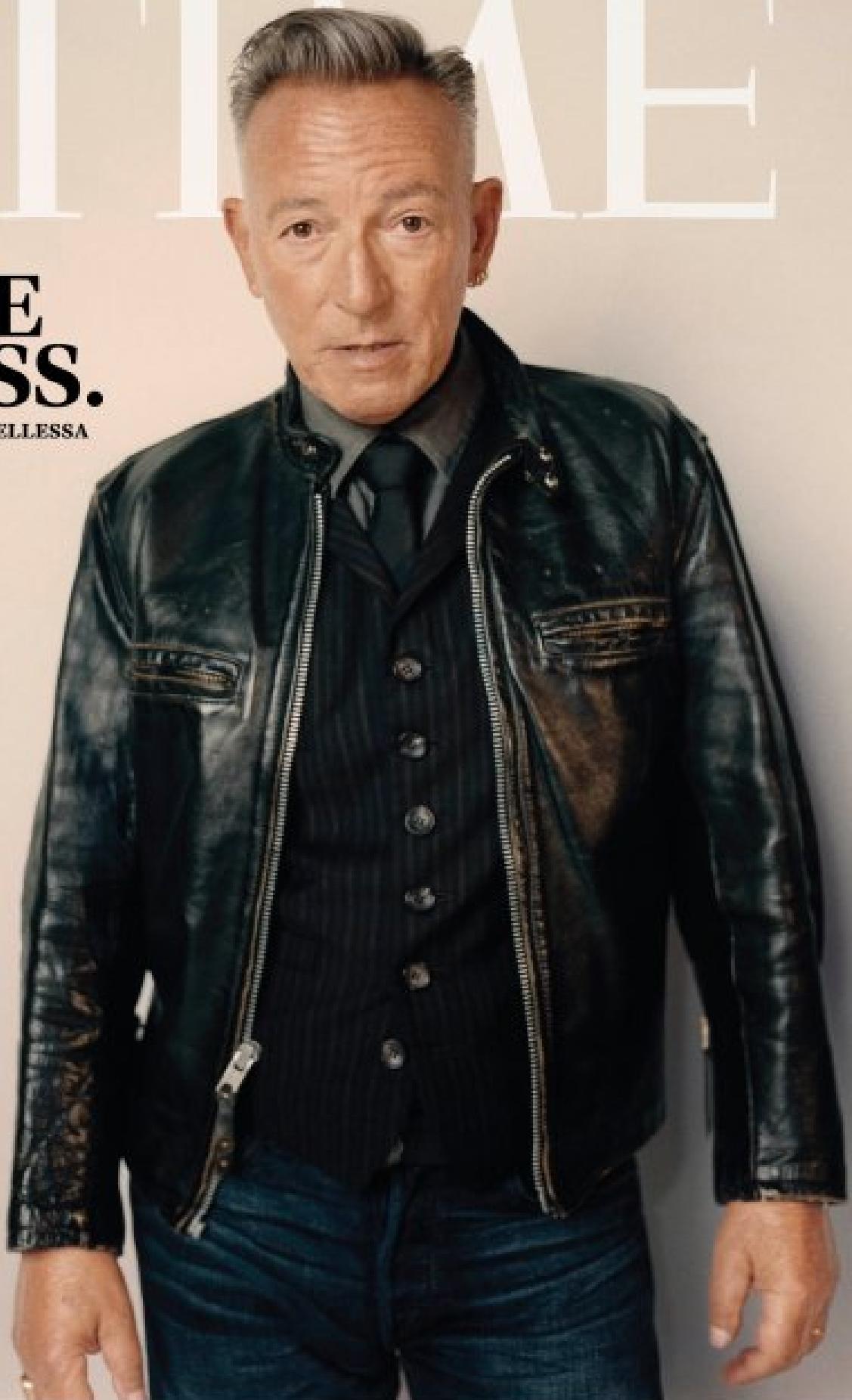


OCT. 13, 2025

TIME

THE BOSS.

by ERIC CORTELESSA



TIME Magazine

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Industry's Climate Strategy

Bruce Springsteen's Long Journey Home

Cortellessa is a correspondent at TIME, based in the Washington, D.C., bureau. He covers Congress, Donald Trump, and national politics.



No one notices Bruce Springsteen.

He makes no effort to hide—black T-shirt, blue jeans, Wayfarer sunglasses, honky-tonk cowboy boots—but for a few minutes, the most famous son of the Jersey Shore achieves a kind of anonymity, even in the one place his sudden appearance seems most plausible: the Asbury Park boardwalk. Passing Madam Marie's, the fortune teller immortalized in his 1973 ballad “4th of July, Asbury Park (Sandy),” I suggest that if people look for him anywhere, it's here. Springsteen chuckles, recalling a T-shirt sold in local shops: I HEARD BRUCE MIGHT SHOW UP.

Soon, we discover what happens when he does. Near the Convention Hall, a double take becomes a selfie request. More follow. A restaurant owner begs him to stay for dinner. Outside the Bruce Springsteen Archives store, a cashier leaps up in delight, serendipitously wearing the very shirt we had just been discussing. “My cloak of invisibility is rapidly fading,” Springsteen says, half-amused, half-resigned. We find refuge in an empty Stone Pony, the fabled club that launched his career, where we spent the afternoon talking about his life and legacy. As for the crowd he slips into a car to leave behind, he says, “I always took it as just part of the job.”

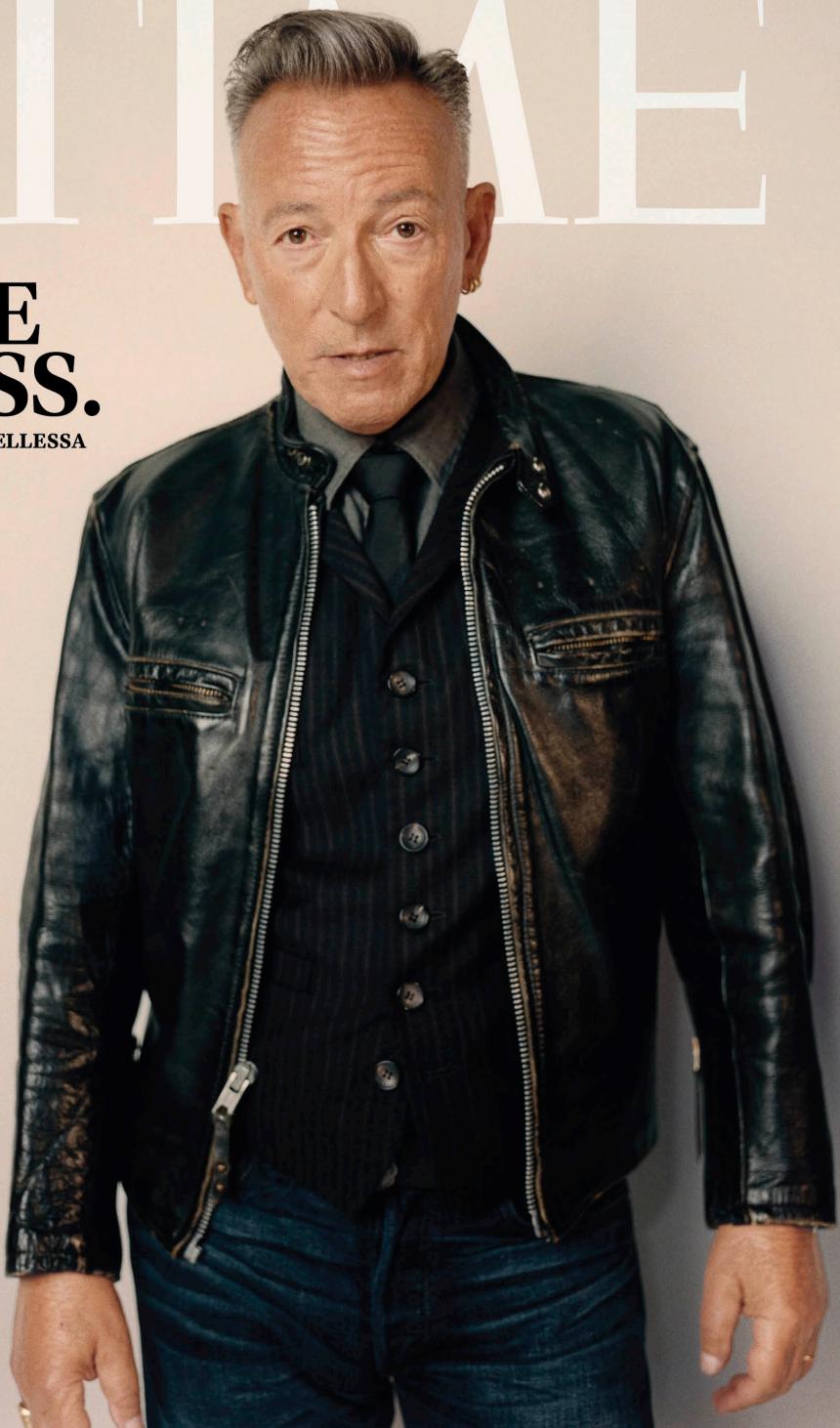
For a half-century, Springsteen’s job has been unlike any other. He has released 21 albums, collecting 20 Grammys, an Oscar, a Tony, the Kennedy Center Honors, and the Presidential Medal of Freedom. He’s written a best-selling memoir, recorded a podcast with [Barack Obama](#), and sold more than 150 million records worldwide. He’s one of the most in-demand live performers on earth, commanding crowds who embrace him with something close to religious devotion. His most recent tour grossed more than \$700 million—the largest haul of his career, eclipsing the Born in the U.S.A. juggernaut of the ’80s.

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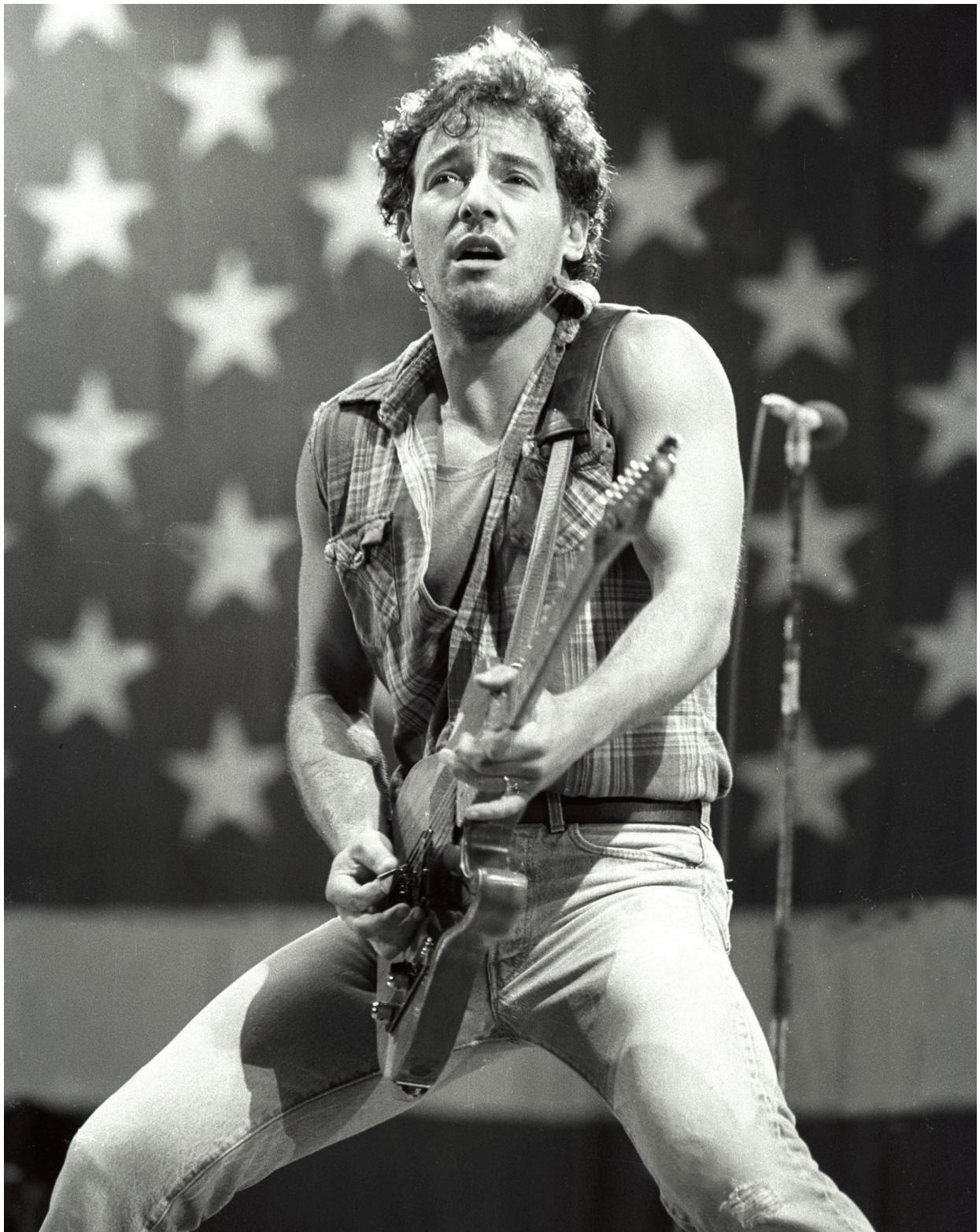
by ERIC CORTELESSA



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But the story of Springsteen is more than the scale of his success. He occupies a rarefied place in American life, maintaining an authenticity rare for a performer of his reach, even as he grapples with the contradictions of his existence. Springsteen is a tribune for the working class who became fabulously rich; a restless outsider who is a rooted family man; and the rock star who has seemingly everything but still wrestles with shadows he cannot shake. As the stages grew larger—from clubs to theaters, arenas to stadiums—Springsteen chose not to disguise the distance between the man onstage and the man in the mirror, but to make it part of the art itself.





Now Springsteen, 76, has undertaken another daring move: surrendering control to a team of filmmakers to tell the story of the most vulnerable period of his life. *Springsteen: Deliver Me From Nowhere*, in theaters Oct. 24, chronicles the making of *Nebraska*, his 1982 acoustic masterpiece. Jeremy Allen White plays Springsteen; [Jeremy Strong](#) portrays his longtime manager Jon Landau. The film captures a sliver of his early 30s, when he was battling his first bout of serious depression, compulsively driving past his childhood home, and eventually seeking therapy, a step Springsteen credits with saving his life. “It could have gone in a lot of different directions,” he says.

That crucible altered the trajectory of his career, sharpening the themes that have fueled his music since—a starker portrait of America, an insistence on dignity for the marginalized, redemption for the broken, the possibility of salvation in community—while allowing him to remain both uncompromising and commercially viable. Just as significant, it led him to embrace family life: the responsibilities and joys so often elusive for rock

stars. “The show-business life is wonderful if it’s part of a larger life,” says Landau, his closest confidant. “If it becomes a substitute for life, that’s the danger zone.”

Read More: [See Early Photos of Bruce Springsteen From the Photographer Who Captures His ‘True Grit’](#)

After the boardwalk, Springsteen returns to his home studio in Colts Neck, a 10 minute drive from where he grew up. Fifty years after *Born to Run*, he may be associated with getting out, but his life has been defined by sticking around. “What I worked very hard on was not running, but on standing, on making your life choices, and then standing with and for them,” he says. “That’s been my theme since that record.” If the heroes of *Born to Run* found their glory in flight, Springsteen has since offered the counter-vision: that to stay put, to face your own demons head on, is its own form of heroism.

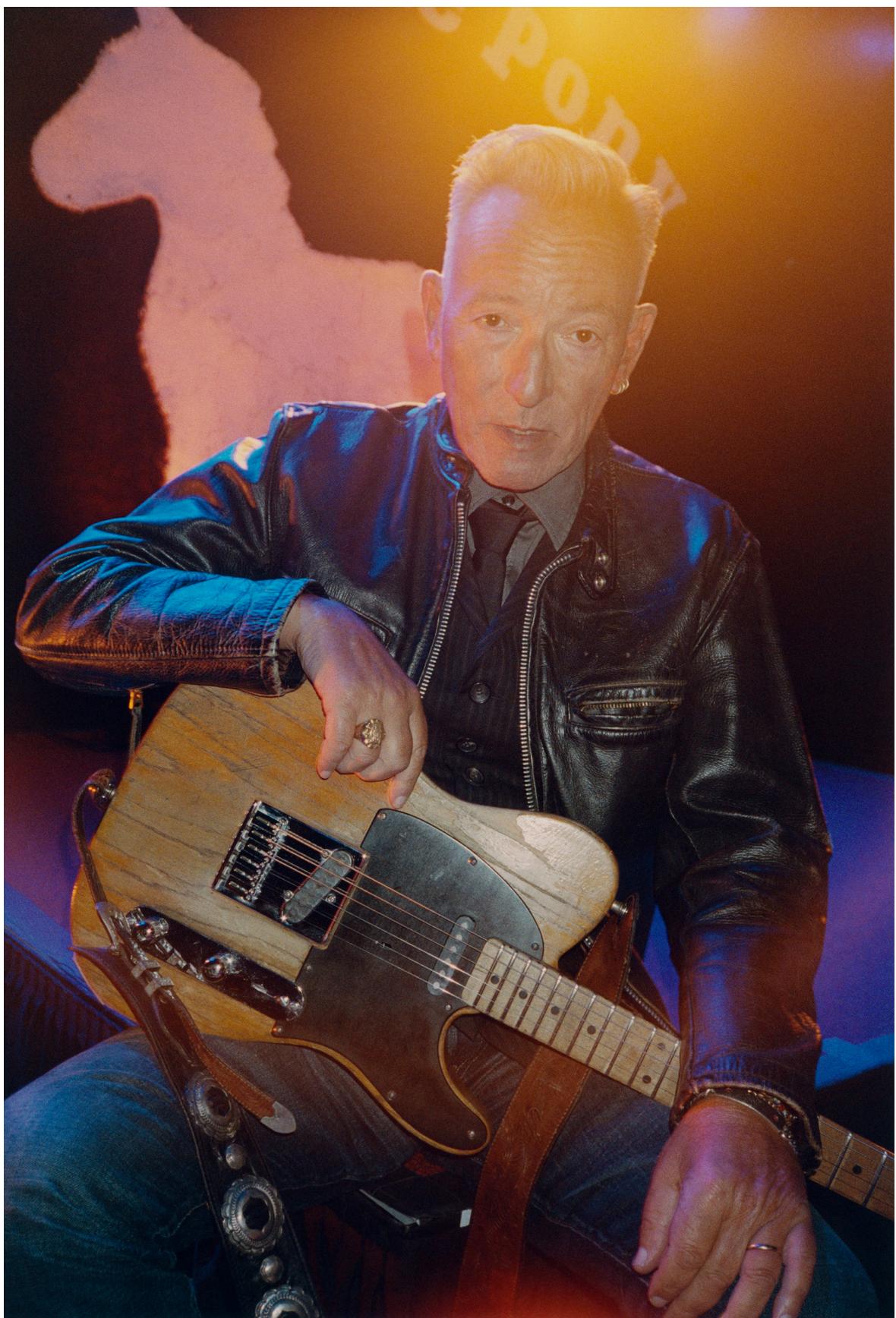
On a gray October afternoon in 2023, Springsteen opened the door of a rented Jersey Shore cottage and ushered three men inside to discuss something he’d long resisted: a film about his life.

Springsteen had invited Scott Cooper, director of brooding films such as *Crazy Heart* and *Out of the Furnace*; Warren Zanes, author of the definitive book on *Nebraska*; and Landau, serving what he claimed were Philly cheesesteaks. “These were not cheesesteaks,” Zanes remembers. “This was really good steak on artisanal bread with exquisite cheese.”

From the outset, Springsteen was drawn to Cooper’s vision—not a cradle-to-the-grave biopic but a compact character study. “This narrow time frame reveals deeper truths about Bruce’s lifelong struggles with identity and creative honesty,” Cooper says. Hardly anyone expected Springsteen to say yes. But with age, Springsteen says, he’s become more willing to agree to proposals he once dismissed. “I’m old. I don’t give a f-ck what I do anymore!” he says with a grin. “As you get older, you feel a lot freer.”

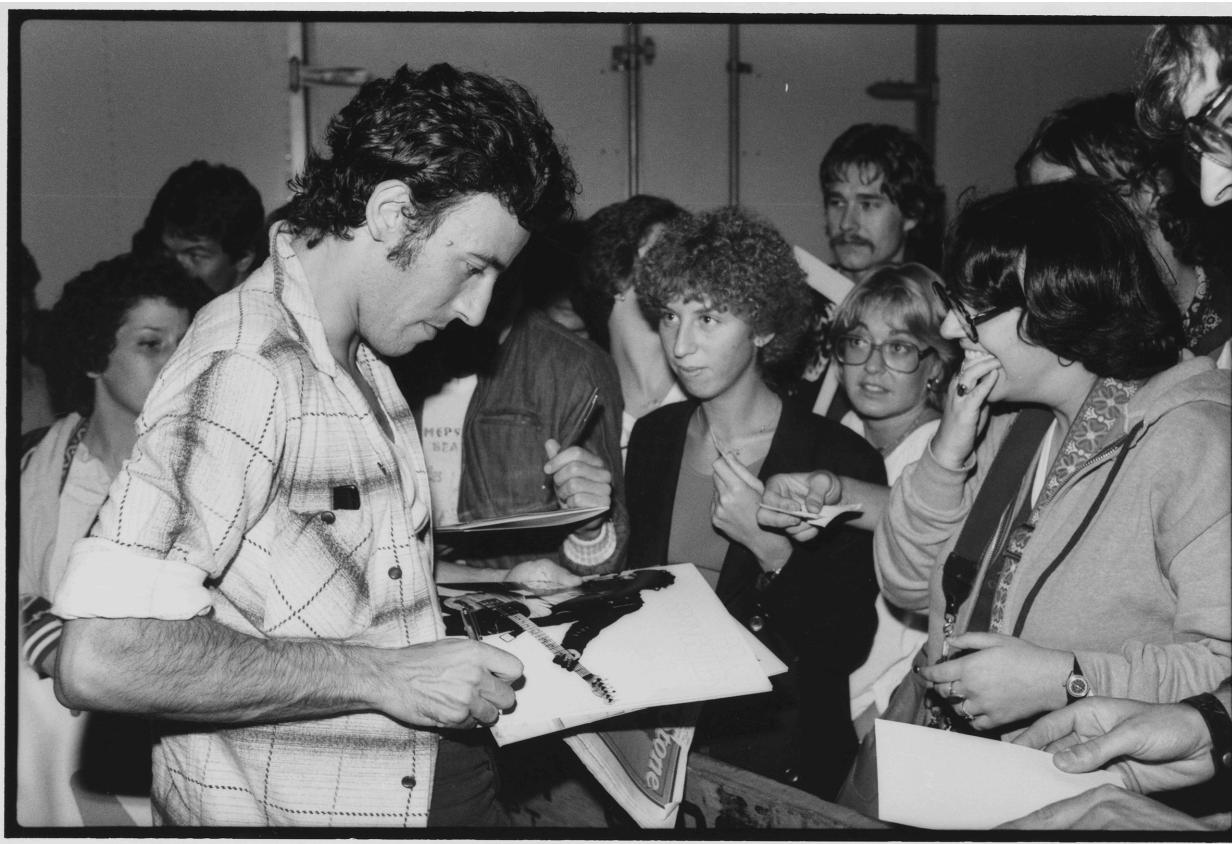
Springsteen recounts the process in a dimly lit Stone Pony. He became a fixture here around his 1975 breakout *Born to Run*. He was on a three-record

deal with Columbia, and though his first two were praised by critics, they disappointed commercially, and the label shifted its attention to Billy Joel. At risk of being cast aside, Springsteen shed the rhyme-drunk ballads of his earlier work. He barely had a driver's license but understood what cars represented to a country rattled by the oil embargo: gas prices had soared, and an ordinary symbol of American freedom suddenly felt precarious. If gas was too expensive, you couldn't drive. If you couldn't drive, you lost your agency. "I didn't know a lot about cars," he says, "but I knew what they meant. It was simply my metaphor."



Born to Run fused the street-level detail of Dylan with the operatic grandeur of Phil Spector. Its opening track, “Thunder Road,” is a summons: the singer beckons Mary into his car, a chance to flee “a town full of losers” for a better life. “Jungleland,” the nine-minute finale, stages the saga of the Magic Rat and the barefoot girl, who slip across Jersey into Harlem only to see their dreams collapse. Critics hailed *Born to Run* as a crowning achievement, something both *sui generis* and revitalizing. The counterculture had curdled, [Vietnam](#) was over but unsettled, and the economy sagged into stagflation. Into that drift came a wiry kid from Freehold, N.J., who made the ordinary seem mythic. “It was a magical group of things and circumstances that helped deliver this guy and deliver Columbia’s dream,” says Springsteen’s first manager Mike Appel.

On Oct. 20, 1975, Springsteen appeared on the [covers of TIME](#) and Newsweek—a feat once reserved for Presidents, [Popes](#), or astronauts. For Springsteen, holed up at the Sunset Marquis for a four-night stand at the Roxy, it felt like a curse. “It’s making you very, very different than all the people you grew up with,” he says. Success was both exhilarating and terrifying; his sister Pam recalls paparazzi peering into their parents’ kitchen. Springsteen and his circle worried about the “hype,” a toxic word that suggested the deflators weren’t far behind. What haunted him even more was how fame might change him. “It’s a very distorted lens to live your life through,” he says. “You have to be very protective of yourself, of what matters dearly to you.”



With 1978's *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, Springsteen planted his feet with those who never made it out—using his songs to speak to someone he could not otherwise reach. He turned toward the working class, sketching figures who resembled his father—the stoic men of “Factory,” the dreamers of “Racing in the Street.”

Douglas Springsteen was taciturn, drifting through jobs he could never keep—cabdriver, prison guard—and prone to rages and long silences, staying up late with beer and cigarettes. He was emotionally absent from his three children—Bruce, Virginia, and Pam—and especially hard on his son, never once saying he loved him. The family's mediator and breadwinner, the one who carried its optimism and kept it afloat, was Bruce's mother Adele, who worked as a legal secretary. (Bruce says now that his bleak songs came from his father whereas his joyous ones—“Rosalita,” “Out in the Street”—came from his mother.) For a working-class man in the 1950s, seeking psychiatric care meant defying social mores. Only decades later was Doug Springsteen diagnosed as bipolar and schizophrenic—enabling him to get the help he

needed. But Bruce would always fear that the strain of mental illness running through his family might one day ensnare him.

Springsteen's next record, *The River*, veered toward connection. "For a long time, I did not write any love songs," he says. "I figured other people were taking care of it. I was interested in other topics, and I simply didn't know what it was." The album produced his first Billboard Top 10 single, "Hungry Heart," and the verdict at Columbia was clear: Springsteen was on the brink of superstardom.

This is where the film *Deliver Me From Nowhere* begins. After The River Tour, Springsteen plunged into psychic free fall. Instead of chasing hits, he retreated to a house in Colts Neck with a four-track recorder. What emerged was *Nebraska*: a desolate gallery of outlaws, killers, and lost souls. After Springsteen laid several tracks for what would become 1984's Born in the U.S.A., which everyone knew was lightning in a bottle, he took a break to record demos on a cassette with the plan of recreating them in the studio with the E Street Band. But the more they rerecorded them, the more Springsteen hated it, so he decided to release the tapes as they were. When *Nebraska* came out on Sept. 30, 1982, Springsteen let the music speak for itself—no interviews, no tour.

He then took a road trip out west and had a breakdown, but in therapy found reconciliation—with both his past and with his father, played in the film by Stephen Graham. "My father was a tough guy," Springsteen says. "He was tough when he was young. He was tough on me when I was young, but fundamentally, underneath, he was a vulnerable, fragile, sweet-hearted, and soulful man. I think you see that part of him at the end of the film." When the movie debuted at the Telluride Film Festival, the reviews were glowing. Already, the film is generating Oscar buzz.

To play the role, White spent hours studying Springsteen—listening to his memoir on tape, watching old interviews—but knew to avoid imitation. He doesn't adopt Springsteen's twang but embodies him psychologically. They first met at a sound check in London's Wembley Stadium last year and cultivated a friendship. White says he made a pact with Springsteen, Landau, and Cooper: "Let's make a movie about a musician during this period in his life that just so happens to be Bruce Springsteen."



If anyone saw Springsteen clearly in this period, it was Landau—portrayed in the film with uncanny precision by Strong. (When he phoned Thom Zimny, Springsteen’s longtime filmmaker, to request archival footage, Strong was still in character, Zimny tells me—method to the core.) Their relationship forms the film’s emotional spine, elevating it into a love story. After *Nebraska*’s release, Springsteen considered suicide. Landau told him plainly, “You need professional help.” The next day, the manager got the star into a therapist’s office. “It was and has been a total life changer,” Springsteen says.

After his [therapist](#) of 25 years died, Springsteen kept going. “When I walked into a new therapist’s office,” he says, “I had a lot more information than when I first walked into Dr. Myers’ and said, ‘I don’t have a home, I don’t have a partner, I don’t have a life beyond my work, and those are things that I want.’”

The film also portrays a dalliance between Springsteen and Odessa Young's "Faye," a composite of several relationships meant to capture his fleeting romances as he began to crave commitment. "It might have been my own biological clock," he tells me. "I was in my early 30s, and you start thinking about, Hey, where is my everything?"

On the Born in the U.S.A. tour, Springsteen invited singer and guitarist Patti Scialfa to join the E Street Band. It was 1984, and the album ruled the charts, its singles dominated MTV, and he would soon marry actor Julianne Phillips. But Scialfa's arrival shifted everything. They had met nearly a decade earlier at the Stone Pony, and Springsteen remembers the exact spot. In fact, we're sitting in it. "I met Patti right in this chair," he says, recalling the moment with clarity: Scialfa stepping down from the stage, her voice still ringing in the room. "I went, Who is that gorgeous redhead singing like Ronnie Spector or Dusty Springfield?" he says. Springsteen introduced himself, and the rest, he says with a smile, "has been the rest."



Toward the end of the decade, his marriage to Phillips ended, his partnership with Scialfa blossomed, and his music veered inward. *Tunnel of Love*,

released in 1987, explored intimacy and the fragility of relationships. “Walk Like a Man,” among his most piercing songs, begins with a child tracing his father’s footsteps in the sand and ends with a groom at the altar, weighing which parts of his old man’s heritage to carry forward and which to leave behind. In 1991, he married Scialfa. “I knew she saw me for who I really was,” he says. “A complicated, messy person. I didn’t have to pretend. I was broken. She was broken in her own way, and we were each other’s personal projects.”

On the eve of their first child’s birth, Springsteen’s father drove hours to see him in Los Angeles. Over 11 a.m. beers, Doug told him: “You’ve been very good to us, and I wasn’t very good to you.” The frank admission was his “greatest gift to me,” Bruce says. “He had the fortitude and the wherewithal and the deep understanding that I was about to become a father, and he didn’t want me to make the same mistakes.” Soon after, Bruce wrote “Living Proof,” a song about the astonishment of becoming a parent—a declaration of transformation and renewal. Two more children followed. All three, now grown, are near the age he was when he made *Nebraska*.

Fatherhood ended Springsteen’s days of running. “Two of the best days of my life,” he once told *Rolling Stone*, “were the day I picked up the guitar and the day that I learned to put it down.” When I remind him, he smiles: “That’s good. I’ll stand by that.” The guitar, he explains, was his first form of self-medication. “It was the only way I knew how to handle my problems, and it was the instrument I went to when I felt myself in a lot of psychological or personal difficulties.”

But to lean on it for everything, he says, is “an abuse of the work, an abuse of the instrument.” Music could carry him through the ecstasy of live performance, but beyond that, “You’ve got to find a bigger life,” he says. “The day you pick it up, that’s the three hours onstage. The day you put it down, that’s the other 21.”

Before stepping onto a Manchester, England, stage on May 14, Springsteen gathered the band for their usual ritual, but instead of his familiar pep talk, he offered a warning: “Might get a little heavy tonight,” he said. “We’ll see.”

Minutes later, he delivered a searing [monologue](#) that ricocheted across the world: “In my home, the America I love, the America I’ve written about that has been a beacon of hope and liberty for 250 years, is currently in the hands of a corrupt, incompetent, and treasonous Administration,” he said. Only two people knew in advance: Landau, who saw the speech and told him to change “not a word,” and the teleprompter operator. “He mentioned he was going to do a monologue,” recalls saxophonist Jake Clemons, his bandmate and nephew of the late Clarence Clemons, Springsteen’s beloved original saxophonist. “We didn’t know what it was until we were onstage.”



For the European tour, Springsteen revised his set list, swapping meditations on mortality from his 2020 album *Letter to You* for fierce political resistance—beginning with “Land of Hope and Dreams,” his gospel-infused anthem of inclusion and redemption, and closing with Dylan’s “Chimes of Freedom,” a hymn of solidarity with the oppressed. “He just got pissed off enough to want to change the theme,” longtime E Street guitarist Steven Van Zandt says. It was a few months into Donald Trump’s norm-shattering second term, and Springsteen was among the first artists of his stature to speak out so forcefully. “If I’m going to stay true to who I’ve tried to be,” he tells me, “I can’t give these guys a free pass.” Politics had long shadowed him: to his fury, “Born in the U.S.A.,” a protest against the neglect of Vietnam [veterans](#),

was hijacked by Ronald Reagan and recast as a flag-saluting celebration. “To understand that song,” he says, “you’ve got to hold two contradictory thoughts at once: that you can feel betrayed by your country and still love it.”

Over the years, he has returned to political and social themes, from the AIDS epidemic and the plight of migrant workers, to deindustrialization and the ravages of war. Critics have mocked the irony of a rock star traveling by private jet while singing about the working poor. He owns the contradiction —“a rich man in a poor man’s shirt,” as he writes in “Better Days.” Today, the joke is old, but something else haunts him: the very people he sings about [have flocked to Trump](#). “A lot of people bought into his lies,” he says. “He doesn’t care about the forgotten anybody but himself and the multibillionaires who stood behind him on Inauguration Day.” Springsteen struggles with another truth: “You have to face the fact that a good number of Americans are simply comfortable with his politics of power and dominance.”

After Springsteen’s speech, [Trump called him “highly overrated”](#) and posted a meme depicting himself striking the rocker with a golf ball. When I bring this up, Springsteen laughs. “I absolutely couldn’t care less what he thinks about me.” What he doesn’t laugh about is the state of the nation. “He’s the living personification of what the 25th Amendment and impeachment were for. If Congress had any guts, he’d be consigned to the trash heap of history.” Nor does he spare Democrats: “We’re desperately in need of an effective alternative party, or for the Democratic Party to find someone who can speak to the majority of the nation. There is a problem with the language that they’re using and the way they’re trying to reach people.”

Springsteen has spent decades exploring the gulf between the [American Dream](#) and the American reality, the widening economic divides that would power Trump’s rise: from the hollowing out of Rust Belt cities, conjured in his 1984 song “My Hometown,” to the populist rage of his 2012 album about the Great Recession, *Wrecking Ball*. “Those conditions are ripe for a demagogue,” he says. “Those things have got to be addressed if we want to live in the America of our better angels. I still believe it’s there, but it’s struggling.”



During that brief stretch on the boardwalk when we elude recognition, Springsteen steers me toward the spot on the beach where he and the E Street Band performed a year earlier. “One of our top five shows of all time for me,” he says of the Sea.Hear.Now festival. The waves crashed behind the stage, as fans—including myself—stood barefoot in the sand. Springsteen crafted a unique set list, reaching back for early deep cuts from when he was still finding his voice—“Blinded by the Light,” “Thunder Crack.” The climax struck when he performed *Born to Run*’s final two songs: “Meeting Across the River” into “Jungleland.” The moment snuck up on Springsteen. “I didn’t realize how symbolic it was going to be for me,” he says. “The town over the past 10 to 15 years returned from the dead. We were here when it was empty and barren.” Here was proof of resurrection: a city revived, a community of fans built over half a century, the arc from isolation to communion—the inverse of the spiritual solitude in which *Nebraska* was born.

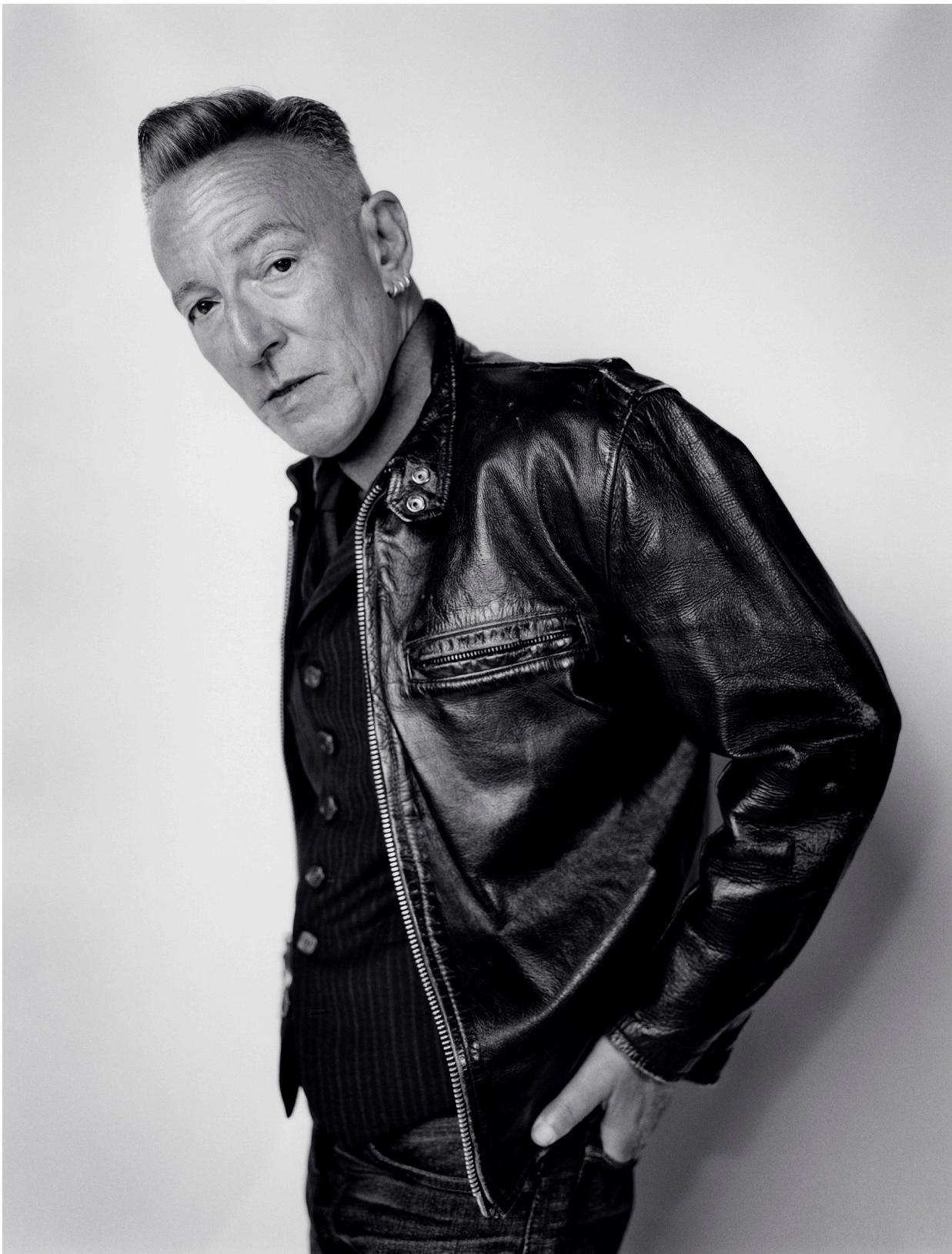
When I ask whether he will tour with the E Street Band again, he doesn’t hesitate. “Of course!” A solo tour is also a possibility, but nothing is planned.

“I just want to keep going,” he tells me. “I want to make records that deal with subjects people haven’t heard me deal with yet.”

In the meantime, he offers other treasures. For years, he had denied the existence of *Electric Nebraska*—full-band versions of the songs he first cut on cassette in 1982. But one day curiosity got the better of him, and he found the tapes in his archives. The sessions will be released this fall, timed with the new film. *Tracks 3*, another collection of unreleased material, is slated for two or three years from now. Springsteen keeps the details close but lets one out: it will include his famously slow, hypnotic cover of Bob Dylan’s “I Want You.”

Today his days follow a simple rhythm: wake up, work out, head to the studio, spend the evenings with Scialfa—who has been battling blood cancer since 2018—reading, watching TV, and listening to music. He just finished *Moby-Dick*, and the young artists he admires are Zach Bryan and boygenius.

New music of his own is on the way. To continue a conversation with his fans, he says, each album must represent something new. “The first thing that really reaches the public is the thing they tend to hold on to and want you to hold on to,” he explains. “What the writer has to do is you write yourself into a box, and then you’re Houdini. You continue your work until you feel yourself locked in that bigger box, then you’re supposed to escape into a bigger box.”



He remembers the mid-'70s, playing to a small crowd in a dingy New York City club after the sensation of *Born to Run*. A friend, baffled, asked, “What are you doing here?” Springsteen had an answer in his mind. “I was just building my little house a block at a time,” he says. “I wasn’t out of the basement yet, but I knew I wanted a career that would live and grow with my audience.” To Springsteen, the Asbury Park concert was the culmination of that long construction project. “I feel that the band kept faith with its audience, worked hard to be at its best, never went onstage without playing like it was the last night on earth.”

But those are the three hours. The other 21 remain his life’s work. At a show in the 1990s, Springsteen performed “My Father’s House,” a harrowing song from *Nebraska*. The narrator dreams of embracing his estranged father, only to wake, drive to the old home, and find a stranger at the door. His father has vanished, their sins lie unatoned, the hope of reconciliation lost. Onstage, Springsteen framed it with a story from therapy. He confessed to his habit of circling his childhood home.

“Something bad happened,” Dr. Myers told him. “You’re going back, thinking you can make it right again.”

“That is what I’m doing,” Springsteen replied.

“Well,” Dr. Myers said, “you can’t.”

When I ask how he absorbed the insight, how he put it into practice, Springsteen pauses. “Well, I don’t know,” he says. “I still drive by that house.”

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How We Chose the 2025 TIME100 Next

Jacobs is Editor in Chief at TIME, where he leads TIME's global newsroom and its journalism across all platforms. Since joining TIME in 2013, Jacobs has held a variety of senior editorial leadership positions. Previously, he was national political correspondent at Reuters, associate editor at Newsweek, and staff reporter for The Daily Beast. His writing has appeared in the Boston Globe and New York Observer.



Six years ago, when we launched the [TIME100 Next](#), it marked our first step in growing the [TIME100](#) from a single moment into a year-round project. As we've added new chapters to the TIME100 story, our mission has remained consistent: to use the TIME100—our list of the globe's most influential people, first released 22 years ago—as a lens to better understand our world, and to guide TIME in our role as a key chronicler of

leadership. To do that, we've taken a wider perspective on influence, and taken deep dives into the worlds of [AI](#), [Climate](#), [Creators](#), [Health](#), and [Philanthropy](#).

TIME100 Next showed us what growth could be possible, and for many at TIME, yours truly included, it remains one of our favorite moments of the year. While we've made it our mission to cover people who have reached the pinnacle of their fields, the TIME100 Next is an opportunity to recognize those still on the rise. Not that we are new to that business: since we recognized 25-year-old Charles Lindbergh as the very first Person of the Year (then called Man of the Year) in 1927, we've known that true influence knows no age and that it can arrive early in a career.

This year's class is no exception to that tradition. It includes 16-year-old [Elliston Berry](#), who was recognized at the State of the Union this year for her work advocating for new protections against digital harassment; 23-year-old [Hana-Rawhiti Maipi-Clarke](#), New Zealand's Gen Z Māori leader; and 22-year-old golf sensation [Jeeno Thitikul](#). They are among the many leaders on this year's list who are younger than the century they are shaping.

Our covers feature three people transforming their fields: actor [Jonathan Bailey](#), singer [Tate McRae](#), and CEO [April Koh](#). Bailey stars in blockbusters including *Jurassic World: Rebirth* and *Wicked*, while simultaneously building the Shameless Fund, his foundation benefiting LGBTQ+ nonprofits. McRae, the 22-year-old Canadian pop star, has had her music streamed more than 20 billion times across all platforms, and is now on a world tour. Koh became the youngest female founder leading a unicorn through her vision of improving access to mental-health care via her startup Spring Health, which is used in over 40 countries.

Our goal with each project is to provide a snapshot of the moment and to recognize those who we feel are truly changing the world this year. For that reason, the list includes young leaders who are working to cement Donald Trump's legacy—as well as those working to oppose it. It means spotlighting leaders from across the world, like Saudi Arabia's [Jomana Alrashid](#), who leads a major media conglomerate; Sudan's [Emi Mahmoud](#), a poet and UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador; and Korean Canadian [Maggie](#)

Kang, the co-director of *K-Pop Demon Hunters*, helping to ensure global voices are heard the world over. It also means celebrating cultural and scientific breakthroughs: Tramell Tillman, who recently became the first Black actor to win the Emmy for Supporting Actor in a Drama Series for his role in *Severance*; Paige Bueckers, the 2025 WNBA Rookie of the Year; and Ben Lamm, whose work reviving the dire wolf landed on the cover of TIME earlier this year.

The selection of the 2025 TIME100 Next was led by Dan Macsai and Cate Matthews with contributions from TIME's editors and reporters around the world, and is supported by our longtime partner Rolex, TIME's official timepiece partner. The stories in this issue are written by TIME's journalists as well as members of the TIME100 community. We are grateful to Cate Blanchett, Fred Swaniker, George Church, and many others who join us in welcoming a new generation of leaders into this issue.

“Everyone on the TIME100 Next leapt into action—often in challenging circumstances—and in doing so, accomplished the extraordinary,” Matthews says. “They demonstrate the power we all have to make a difference.”

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Trump Wants to Target Left-Wing Groups. Here's How He Might Do It

Bennett is the senior White House correspondent at TIME, based in the Washington, D.C., bureau. He has covered wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, interviewed world leaders, traveled across the globe with President Trump and President Biden, and written extensively about intelligence, immigration, and the fallout of major disasters.



In the wake of Charlie Kirk's assassination earlier this month, President Donald Trump and members of his administration have openly discussed [punishing](#) left-leaning organizations they believe fuel [political violence](#). Experts say one tactic that's been mentioned could be especially harmful to some of the targeted groups: going after their tax-exempt status.

The charge was made most explicitly last Monday, when Vice President J.D. Vance singled out the Ford Foundation and the George Soros-funded Open Society Foundations [while hosting Charlie Kirk's podcast](#). “We are going to go after the NGO network that foments and facilitates and engages in violence,” Vance said, referring to non-governmental organizations.

[video id=xA2G8tKc autostart="viewable"]

Asked about the Administration’s plans, a White House official told TIME in a statement: “The White House is exploring a wide variety of options to put pen to paper to address left-wing political violence and the network of organizations that fuel and fund it. Specifics on what that looks like continue to be discussed.”

Legal experts say the loss of tax-exempt status would amount to an existential threat to most organizations. But the White House’s ability to revoke any group’s tax-exempt status would be difficult, and could lead to protracted court battles.

For many charities, losing their tax-exempt status would be “the end of the road,” says Ofer Lion, a lawyer based in Los Angeles who is expert on non-profit tax law. It is that categorization that allows donors to deduct donations from their own taxes. The loss of their tax-exempt status would immediately hobble a group’s fundraising, as well as potentially force the organization to have to pay taxes on funds it holds in an endowment.

To get tax-exempt status, an organization has to describe itself to the Internal Revenue Service and explain its intention to further charitable, educational, scientific or religious purposes. The law already forbids a charity from supporting a listed terrorist organization and allows the IRS to suspend the tax-exempt status of a charity that is supporting or engaging in terrorist activity. If a charity believes it has had its tax-exempt status unfairly suspended, it can ask the IRS for administrative review and later can take their challenge to court.

“The typical IRS investigations are based on how the money is being used and whether the money is being used to further exempt purposes or if overall the organization is not actually operated for its exempt purposes or

providing private benefits or is self dealing, or something like that,” says Roger Colinvaux, professor of law at The Catholic University of America. IRS investigations, he adds, are not usually “targeted toward an organization’s viewpoint and really viewpoint shouldn’t come into it at all.”

Trump has shown an increasing willingness to use the power of the Federal government to police speech. On Wednesday, ABC [suspended Jimmy Kimmel’s late-night show](#) hours after Federal Communications Commission Chairman Brendan Carr had complained on a podcast about comments Kimmel made related to Kirk’s shooting. Carr has influence over local stations’ broadcast licenses, as well as a merger being sought by the owners of some ABC affiliate stations. “We can do this the easy way,” Carr said, “or the hard way.”

[video id=HHb7y2XN]

ABC’s immediate relenting appeared to embolden Trump. As he flew back to Washington, he [told reporters](#) on Air Force One that if stations “give me only bad publicity—press—and they’re getting a license, I would think maybe their license should be taken away.”

During Vance’s stint as a podcaster last Monday, White House Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy Stephen Miller said that one of the last messages Charlie Kirk sent him was to say that the Trump administration needs a strategy to go after left-wing organizations promoting violence. “I will write those words on my heart and I will carry them out,” Miller said.

The threats coming from Vance and a top Trump official alarmed many of the country’s major philanthropies. In response, 158 philanthropic organizations published an open letter Wednesday saying that political violence has “no place in our democracy” and that organizations “should not be attacked for carrying out their missions or expressing their values in support of the communities they serve.” The letter’s signers included both the Ford Foundation and Open Society Foundations, as well as other prominent charitable organizations including the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Mellon Foundation and the Bush Foundation. “Attempts to silence speech, criminalize opposing viewpoints, and misrepresent and limit

charitable giving undermine our democracy and harm all Americans,” the letter stated.

There is a long history of political players improperly deploying the IRS for political purposes, says Patrick G. Eddington, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute. “The IRS has been misused repeatedly for politically motivated audits/reviews from the McCarthy era onwards,” he wrote in an email. A more recent example, Eddington said, was the [Obama-era scandal](#) over IRS audits of various Tea Party groups, with many of the groups alleging they were being unfairly singled out. The Trump administration [settled a lawsuit](#) over the IRS investigations in 2017.

Congress was concerned enough about White House involvement in IRS activities to pass a law in 1998 that explicitly prohibits “executive branch influence over taxpayer audits and other investigations.” The law makes it illegal for a President, Vice President or any employee in their offices “to request, directly or indirectly, any officer or employee of the Internal Revenue Service to conduct or terminate an audit or other investigation of any particular taxpayer with respect to the tax liability of such taxpayer.”

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How Trump's H-1B Reform Could Harm American Tech Innovation

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

Pillay is an editorial fellow at TIME, interested in how AI and other digital technologies are changing us. He is currently supported by the Tarbell Fellowship.



President Trump sent shockwaves through the tech industry over the weekend by announcing a \$100,000 payment for new employer-filed H-1B visa applications submitted after September 21, 2025. Since 1990, hundreds of thousands of foreigners have come to work for U.S. tech companies via the visa system. But in a [proclamation](#), Trump wrote that the system had

been “deliberately exploited to replace, rather than supplement, American workers with lower-paid, lower-skilled labor.”

Many experts agree that the H-1B system is flawed and needs amending. But TIME spoke with three professors in economics or business who believe that Trump’s new fee system could be counterproductive: that it might push talent overseas; render universities and nonprofits unable to recruit foreign experts; and harm American tech innovation, including in the rapidly emerging field of AI.

The idea that the H-1B visa program has on net taken jobs from U.S. workers is “empirically opposite to the truth,” says [Giovanni Peri](#), an economics professor at the University of California, Davis. “Foreign STEM workers have been an incredible engine of growth,” he says, noting that multiple [studies](#) have found that their presence tends to increase job creation and wealth for America writ large.

The new H-1B fee will “hurt the innovation and competitiveness of the U.S. industry,” says Subodha Kumar, a professor at the Fox School of Business at Temple University. “A lot of the innovation and R&D work being done in the U.S. involves people on H-1B visas.”

Read More: [*H-1B Visas Have Been Transformed. Here’s What You Need to Know About the Changes*](#)

H-1Bs and the tech industry

H-1B visas are designed to allow experts in specialized fields to come work in the U.S. on a non-immigration basis. There are more than half a million U.S. residents on H-1B visas, the U.S. government [estimated](#) in 2020. And many of those residents work for tech companies as engineers and IT specialists. A report from the Department of Homeland Security found that 64% of approved H-1B petitions in the 2024 financial year were computer-related.

Tech leaders who came to the U.S. with the help of H-1B visas include Microsoft’s Satya Nadella, Google’s Sundar Pichai, and Zoom’s [Eric Yuan](#).

One 2021 study found that the number of H-1B visa holders in a state was [highly correlated](#) with the number of issued patents, especially in computer science and optoelectronics. Another [report](#) found that the top beneficiaries of the program include Amazon (which employed nearly 15,000 workers utilizing H-1B visas in 2024), IBM, Microsoft, Google, and Meta.

In December, Elon Musk wrote on X that “the reason I’m in America along with so many critical people who built SpaceX, Tesla and hundreds of other companies that made America strong is because of H-1B.”

A “broken” system

But Musk, the same week, also called the H-1B system “broken,” and advocated for major reform. The system has faced intense scrutiny from across the political spectrum, as well as from those inside of it.

Demand for H-1B visas far outstrips the available supply. To address this, a lottery system for applicants was put in place, which critics say is manifestly inefficient. Many workers have to wait for [years](#) for a green card —and once in the program, they have limited ability to change companies or found their own start-ups.

Meanwhile, leaders on the left, like [Bernie Sanders](#), have voiced concerns that the system is exploitative. [A 2020 study](#) by the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) found that most H-1B employers pay migrant workers less than market rate salaries. And on the right, leaders like Steve Bannon [fear](#) that the system takes jobs from Americans.

During his first term, Trump [imposed restrictions](#) on the program, with rejection rates of applications [spiking](#). He also tried to ban H-1B visas, but was unsuccessful in federal court.

Trump is now trying a different tactic: A \$100,000 payment for new applicants. The announcement caused a [panic](#) in Silicon Valley, with tech companies advising their H-1B employees not to leave the country lest they not be allowed back in. However, White House officials said on Saturday that the changes would only apply to new applications, not renewals.

The decision will be met with legal challenges. It is unclear whether Trump has the authority to amend the fee in this way, and it may or may not hold up in court.

But even those who advocate for reform of the program are skeptical that Trump's \$100,000 fee will fix things. "I don't think this is the solution to the disruptions we've seen in the job market," says [Madeline Zavodny](#), an economics professor at the University of North Florida.

She says a better approach would be to institute an auction system at the federal level, letting employers bid for the right to hire foreign workers via the H-1B program, while exempting nonprofits, universities, and the like from this process.

Peri adds that raising the cap from 85,000 would enable a more efficient system. He argues that the reason tech companies turn to foreign labor is because the supply of high-skilled workers is simply insufficient to meet demand. "It's already way easier to hire an American than a foreign-born worker," he says. Some researchers, however, [dispute](#) the idea that there is a shortage of high-skilled workers in STEM roles more broadly.

Impact on the labor and tech sector

Several tech executives have responded positively to the new fee. OpenAI's Sam Altman [said on CNBC](#): "We need to get the smartest people in the country, and streamlining that process and also sort of outlining financial incentives seems good to me." Reed Hastings, Netflix's chairman, called the tax a "great solution." "It will mean H-1B is used just for very high value jobs, which will mean no lottery needed," he says.

Coreweave CEO Michael Intrator, in contrast, [described](#) the new fee as "sand in the gears" for his company.

The impacts of the fee may be most acutely felt by the Indian I.T. ecosystem. About 70 percent of H-1B holders are Indian citizens. Critics now worry that the fee could [price out](#) Indian engineers from joining American companies. Dileep Krishna, an Indian entrepreneur, [wrote](#) on

LinkedIn that the changes might cause Indian tech workers to return home. “Here’s to the next generation of Indian talent with global exposure and coming back to India and building for the global markets,” he wrote.

Many more Indian tech workers may go to other countries abroad with flourishing industries, like the U.K. According to Zavodny, [research](#) shows that when large companies are unable to hire employees on an H-1B, they end up offshoring the work instead. “It goes to Canada, the U.K., or India,” she says. Small firms, meanwhile, may simply be unable to hire the talent necessary for them to grow.

Peri adds that the academic and nonprofit spaces could also be hit especially hard. While the number of visas for private sector workers is capped at 85,000 per year—a limit which has been unchanged since 2005—certain employers, including those at certain universities, nonprofits, and governmental agencies, are exempt. In 2024, over 141,000 new visas were approved.

For many employers of workers on H-1Bs at those types of organizations—who also contribute significantly to America’s technological lead by conducting cutting-edge research, says Peri—the new \$100,000 payment will be prohibitive. Harvard, for example, [typically](#) sponsors 125 new H-1B visa petitions every year, which would amount to more than \$10 million in annual fees.

Kumar, at Temple, says the move could help the domestic tech job market in the long term—but that a lot of infrastructure will need to be built to make that happen. “In the long run, there will be a push to create the domestic workforce to meet some of these needs,” he says. “But that is not an easy task at all. Right now, it will just create more confusion, and tech companies really have to work hard on reducing their losses.”

For Peri, there is an irreconcilable tension between the administration’s twin goals: protecting American jobs and maintaining the U.S.’ position as a global leader in STEM. “I think in the administration there are two types of people,” he says. “The ones who are very clear about the negative consequences—the Elon Musk types, business people—and the people who want to cut immigration for ideological reasons,” such as Stephen Miller,

the White House Deputy Chief of Staff for policy. “We will see who prevails in the long-run,” he says.

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Is the U.S. at War With Venezuela? Latest Strike Raises Legal Concerns

Jeyaretnam is a reporter at TIME, based in the Singapore bureau. She covers the Asia-Pacific region and global overnight news.



The Brief September 16, 2025

Trump orders strike on second Venezuelan vessel, U.K. Prime Minister urged to consider sanctions on Elon Musk, and more

Podcast ID – Short Length: f58cfac7-8828-4ec6-a436-6044c8cf1797

Podcast ID – Long Length: f58cfac7-8828-4ec6-a436-6044c8cf1797

President Donald Trump ordered a strike on a second Venezuelan vessel in international waters, alleging that it carried drugs, shortly after Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro said the U.S. was trying to provoke a “major war.”

The strike, conducted on Monday morning, killed three people off the coast of Venezuela. Trump claimed that the vessel was transporting drugs headed for the U.S. The strike comes less than a month after the [U.S. mobilized military assets and personnel near the South American country](#) and [conducted a similar strike on another Venezuelan vessel](#), which killed 11 people.

“This morning, on my Orders, U.S. Military Forces conducted a SECOND Kinetic Strike against positively identified, extraordinarily violent drug trafficking cartels and narcoterrorists,” Trump [posted](#) on Truth Social.

“These extremely violent drug trafficking cartels POSE A THREAT to U.S. National Security, Foreign Policy, and vital U.S. Interests.”

He added: “BE WARNED — IF YOU ARE TRANSPORTING DRUGS THAT CAN KILL AMERICANS, WE ARE HUNTING YOU!”

Trump included a 27-second video in the post that showed a vessel exploding and bursting into flames, which he said was proof that the boat carried drugs. It’s not clear from the video what was on the vessel.

“All you have to do is look at the cargo that was spattered all over the ocean —big bags of cocaine and fentanyl all over the place,” Trump [told](#) reporters at the Oval Office. “We recorded them. It was very careful, because we know you people would be after us. We’re very careful.”

Still, Trump’s assurances, however, have done little to assuage concerns from some that the U.S. is headed toward—or already engaging in—an unauthorized war with Venezuela. Here’s what to know.

How Trump has targeted Venezuela in drug crackdown

The Trump Administration has said that its attacks on Venezuela are part of its wider crackdown on drug trafficking into the U.S. On the first day of his second term in office, Trump [declared a national emergency](#) over illegal immigration and drug trafficking across the U.S.-Mexico border. He has since imposed tariffs on [Canada](#) and [Mexico](#), accusing the countries of not sufficiently clamping down on cross-border fentanyl smuggling, and on [China](#) over its alleged manufacturing of fentanyl. He also [designated](#) drug cartels, including Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua, as foreign terrorist groups and labeled them a national security threat. Last month, he signed a secret directive to the Pentagon authorizing the use of military force against these cartels, according to the [New York Times](#).

The Administration has [ratcheted up its offensive](#) on Venezuela specifically. It has accused Maduro of being “one of the world’s largest drug traffickers” and leader of the so-called Cartel of the Suns, which the Venezuelan government has refuted. Last month, the Administration doubled the reward to \$50 million for information leading to the arrest of Maduro, whom Trump has [called](#) a dictator. The U.S. government does not recognize Maduro’s last two electoral victories.

Meanwhile, Attorney General Pam Bondi [said](#) last month that the U.S. government had seized up to \$700 million of assets allegedly linked to Maduro. Trump also [issued](#) penalty tariffs on countries that purchase oil from Venezuela in March.

The Trump Administration has also cracked down on Venezuelan immigration into the U.S., including [revoking the protected status](#) of hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans and [deporting 238 Venezuelans](#) in March [to an El Salvadoran prison](#), several of whom U.S. courts have said were [wrongfully deported](#).

On Sept. 2, Trump ordered a military strike on a Venezuelan vessel, killing 11 people whom the Trump Administration claimed were members of Tren de Aragua and transporting illegal narcotics. The *Times*, however, [reported](#)

that the boat had turned around after noticing a military aircraft following it. The strike came after Trump had directed U.S. navy ships to the edge of Venezuelan waters, prompting the Venezuelan government to mobilize militia troops and [bringing the two countries to a precarious standoff](#).

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Monday said that the U.S. government had “100% fidelity and certainty” that the boat in the first strike was involved in trafficking drugs to the U.S.

“What needs to start happening is some of these boats need to get blown up,” Rubio said in an [interview with Fox News](#). He added that since the strike, the “number of boats heading towards the United States suddenly dropped dramatically.”

When asked on Sunday if the U.S. would “start doing strikes on mainland Venezuela,” Trump [said](#), “We’ll see what happens.”

Venezuela says relations with U.S. ‘destroyed’

Shortly before Monday’s strike, Maduro said at a press conference in Caracas that what “battered relations” existed between the U.S. and Venezuela had “been destroyed by their bomb threats” and were now “completely broken.”

He characterized U.S. actions as “aggression all down the line, it’s a police aggression … a political aggression, a diplomatic aggression, and an ongoing aggression of military character.”

“The communications with the government of the U.S. are thrown away. They are thrown away by them with their threats of bombs, death and blackmail,” Maduro said.

Venezuela had responded to the Sept. 2 strike by [flying](#) two F-16 fighter jets over a U.S. Navy destroyer on Sept. 4.—to which Trump [warned](#) that the U.S. would shoot down Venezuelan jets that “put us in a dangerous situation.” Maduro [claimed](#) after the Sept. 2 strike that eight U.S. warships with 1,200 missiles were targeting Venezuela, adding that his country was in “maximum readiness to defend” itself.

On Saturday, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Yván Gil accused the U.S. military of boarding a Venezuelan vessel, which he said was a “small, harmless” fishing boat. U.S. forces seized the vessel, Gil said, and “illegally and hostilely” detained those onboard for eight hours.

The Venezuelan Foreign Ministry said whoever ordered the action was “looking for an incident to justify escalating war in the Caribbean, with the aim of regime change.”

The Trump Administration earlier this month denied seeking regime change, arguing that its military build-up is intended to stop drug-smuggling by cartels.

Most cocaine in Latin America is produced in Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia —not Venezuela. In 2019, 74% of cocaine shipments to the U.S. came through the Pacific, which Venezuela does not border, while 24% came through the Caribbean, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration.



‘Blowing ships willy-nilly’ raises legal concerns

Some observers have raised concerns around the legality of the U.S. military strike in international waters.

Countries are prohibited from using force unless under attack per the United Nations charter. After designating Tren de Aragua as a terrorist organization, Trump accused the cartel of “perpetrating, attempting, and threatening an invasion of predatory incursion against the territory of the United States,” invoking the 1798 Alien Enemies Act, and said the gang was conducting “irregular warfare against the U.S.” at the direction of Maduro.

But after the first strike, Michael Becker, an assistant professor of international human rights law at Trinity College Dublin told the [BBC](#) that “the fact that U.S. officials describe the individuals killed by the U.S. strike as narco-terrorists does not transform them into lawful military targets.”

Becker said the strike likely violated the U.N.’s bar on the use of force as well as protections of the right to life under international human rights law. He added in a [post](#) on X on Monday: “It doesn’t matter if the victims are criminals. These are murders.”

Other legal experts also weighed in to the BBC. “Intentional killing outside armed conflict hostilities is unlawful unless it is to save a life immediately,” said Mary Ellen O’Connell, a professor at the Notre Dame Law School.

It’s not just international law in question. In the U.S., the President is required to have Congressional approval in deciding whether the U.S. should go to war, though the President has the authority to use force in limited circumstances under the 2001 and 2002 Authorizations of Use of Military Force (AUMF), which have come under bipartisan criticism for effectively giving Presidents a “[blank check](#)” to order military actions without Congressional approval.

A source familiar with Pentagon thinking told [CNN](#), “If there was a boat full of al Qaeda fighters smuggling explosives towards the U.S., would anyone even ask this question?” Congress did officially authorize U.S. use of force

against al Qaeda under the 2001 AUMF after the Sept. 11 attacks, which it has not done against Tren de Aragua.

“The fact that Congress has just been completely left out [of] the loop suggests the Trump Administration doesn’t feel that it has to follow the ordinary rules of the game,” Oona Hathaway, a professor of international law at Yale Law School, told [NPR](#).

Rumen Cholakov, a visiting lecturer of U.S. constitutional law at King’s College London, told the BBC, “It is not immediately obvious that drug cartels such as Tren de Aragua would be within the President’s AUMF powers, but that might be what ‘narco-terrorists’ is hinting at.”

White House spokesperson Anna Kelly told the [Times](#) that Trump’s order for the first strike “acted in line with the laws of armed conflict to protect our country from those trying to bring poison to our shores.”

Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul, a Republican, expressed concern about the extrajudicious nature of the strikes. “Did he ever read To Kill a Mockingbird? Did he ever wonder what might happen if the accused were immediately executed without trial or representation??” Paul [posted](#) on X on Sept. 6, in reply to a [post](#) from Vice President J.D. Vance arguing that “Killing cartel members who poison our fellow citizens is the highest and best use of our military.”

California Sen. Adam Schiff, a Democrat, said on Monday that he will introduce a war powers resolution to “reclaim Congress’s power to declare war.” (Earlier this year, lawmakers similarly [sought to rein in Trump’s military involvement](#) in the war between Israel and Iran, which ended after the U.S. [bombed three Iranian nuclear facilities](#).)

“Donald Trump just blew up another boat in the middle of the ocean with no legal justification,” Schiff [posted](#) on X.

In a video accompanying the post, Schiff called the two strikes “extra-judicial killings” that put “us at risk,” noting that the strikes may set a precedent for other countries to similarly attack U.S. vessels on the basis of alleged drug trafficking.

“You probably saw that the President has blown another ship out of the water, again claiming that these were narco-terrorists and somehow that he has the authority to do this. He does not,” Schiff said. “I don’t want to see us get into some war with Venezuela, because the President is just blowing ships willy-nilly out of the water.”

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Britain, Canada and Australia Formally Recognize Palestinian State

Hall is an editor at TIME. He was previously a Middle East correspondent based in Beirut, and later a U.S. correspondent.



Britain, Canada and Australia formally [recognized a Palestinian state](#) on Sunday, a move seen as both a rebuke of Israel's continued assault on Gaza and an attempt to pressure it into accepting a two-state solution.

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer said his decision to join [nearly 150](#) other nations in recognizing Palestinian statehood was made "to keep alive the possibility of peace and a two-state solution."

“With the actions of Hamas, the Israeli government escalating the conflict, and settlement building being accelerated in the West Bank, the hope of a two-state solution is fading. But we cannot let that light go out,” Starmer said in a video statement on Sunday.

Read more: [Which countries have recognized a Palestinian state?](#)

The coordinated action by the three countries comes ahead of the United Nations General Assembly this week, where France and Portugal are also expected to recognize the State of Palestine.

The largely symbolic move puts the countries at odds with the Trump Administration, which has stood firm beside its close ally Israel and opposed any move towards Palestinian statehood.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is set to address the General Assembly this week before meeting with Trump, called the decision a “prize” for Hamas.

“It will not happen,” he said. “A Palestinian state will not be established west of the Jordan River.”

Starmer had announced his intention to recognize a Palestinian state in late July, but said he would defer if Israel took steps to address the dire humanitarian crisis in Gaza, agreed to a ceasefire with Hamas, and pursued peace that allowed Palestinians their own state.

Since then, Israel has launched a ground offensive in famine-hit Gaza City that has [displaced some 400,000 people](#), and the United Nations Independent International [Commission of Inquiry](#) has determined that Israel is responsible for the commission of genocide in Gaza.

Read More: [Israel Has Committed Genocide in Gaza, Says U.N. Commission of Inquiry](#)

These acts include “killing Palestinians, causing serious bodily or mental harm, deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about the

destruction of the Palestinians, and imposing measures intended to prevent births,” [according to the Commission](#).

Israel has strongly rejected the report’s findings and called for the Commission to be abolished.

“Israel categorically rejects this distorted and false report and calls for the immediate abolition of this Commission of Inquiry,” said the [Israeli Foreign Ministry](#) on Tuesday, claiming that those who published the report are “Hamas proxies.”

The United Kingdom’s recognition holds particular resonance due to its prominent role in the foundation of Israel. The UK became the governing colonial power of what was then Palestine following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I. It later penned the Balfour Declaration, which backed the establishment of “a national home for the Jewish people.”

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney also announced his country’s recognition on Sunday.

“Canada recognises the State of Palestine and offers our partnership in building the promise of a peaceful future for both the State of Palestine and the State of Israel,” he said.

Palestinian Foreign Minister Varsen Aghabekian Shahin welcomed the announcements.

“It is a move bringing us closer to sovereignty and independence. It might not end the war tomorrow, but it’s a move forward, which we need to build on and amplify,” she said.

The international community has long called for negotiations to solve the Israel-Palestine conflict based on a two-state solution. Previous negotiations have set the basis for a Palestinian state as the borders that existed before the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, defined in [U.N. Resolution 242](#). Those borders would grant a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

But the prospect of two states has dimmed after years of illegal Israeli settlement construction on Palestinian land in the West Bank. Now, some 90% of Gaza's population has been displaced and much of the territory has been made unlivable by widespread Israeli bombing.

The Hamas attack on southern Israel on October 7 has only hardened Israeli positions towards the two-state solution.

Israel's foreign ministry called the move by the three countries "nothing but a reward for jihadist Hamas".

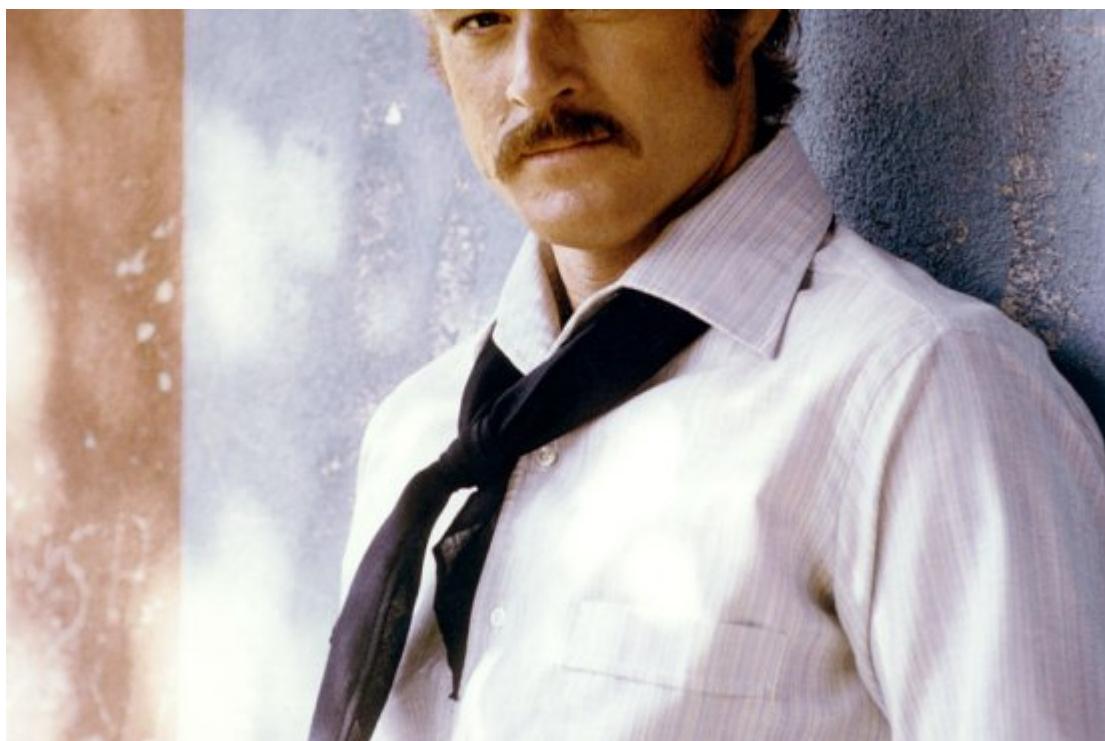
"This declaration does not promote peace, but on the contrary – further destabilizes the region and undermines the chances of achieving a peaceful solution in the future," it added in a post on X.

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Robert Redford's Face Could Tell Nothing But the Truth

Zacharek is the film critic at TIME. She is the recipient of a Newswomen's Club of New York award and was a 2015 Pulitzer Prize finalist.



A genuinely dazzling movie star who used his charm, influence, and money to give aspiring filmmakers a leg up in the movie business, to help protect the natural world from those who would strip it bare for their own gain, to show by example how film storytelling can not only reflect facets of the American character but help shape it: a human being who could do all that seems almost impossible to fathom in this age of disinformation, misinformation, and ugly political discord. But that was Robert Redford, who died on September 16 at age 89. Redford was an actor, a producer, a director; over the course of his long career, he touched every aspect of the movie business. But most essentially, he was a communicator, an artist who

could speak to us in a place beyond words, with just the flicker of a smile—though even then, as a performer and as a person, he was the kind of guy who made you instinctively lean in close, to *want* to hear what he had to say. Redford could do it all, such that he seems to have packed more than one lifetime into his 89 years on Earth.

Redford contracted polio as a child growing up in Los Angeles, in the days before vaccines. Though his case wasn't severe enough to land him in an iron lung, he did have to spend weeks in bed recuperating, and as a reward, his mother took him to Yosemite National Park. When [I interviewed Redford in 2018](#), he told me about that trip, about how the family car emerged from a tunnel, revealing the park in all its natural splendor. "All the magical beauty of that area—it looks like it was sculpted by God," he said. Later, as a teenager, he worked at Yosemite for three summers, though he was hardly a model kid. He hung out with a rough-around-the-edges crowd of kids in high school, and reportedly sat in the back of the auditorium at his graduation, reading *Mad* magazine.

Read more: [How One of Robert Redford's Landmark Films Nearly Fell Apart](#)

His hope was to become a painter, and by age 19 he'd saved up enough money to spend a year in Europe, "on the bum," as he put it. Though he would continue to paint and draw throughout his life, that trip was formative for him in other ways: he understood more about politics, about nature, about how people elsewhere in the world thought and lived. He studied art—showing an interest in animation, specifically—at the University of Colorado at Boulder, though by the late 1950s, he'd found his way to acting. His career began in television and on stage: his breakthrough came in Neil Simon's 1963 play *Barefoot in the Park*—later he would also costar, with Jane Fonda, in the 1967 film version.

From there, you'd need a scroll a million words long to adequately list Redford's accomplishments. His directorial debut, 1980's *Ordinary People*, won four Oscars, including Best Picture and Best Director. As director, he would go on to adapt Norman Maclean's *A River Runs Through It* (1992), and he assayed the quiz show scandal of the 1950s with *Quiz Show* (1994). And as an actor, Redford chose his projects carefully, often gravitating to

roles that somehow connected with the absurdity of American politics, and its potential to foster corruption. Those films included Michael Ritchie's 1972 satire *The Candidate* and also, of course, Alan J. Pakula's glorious true-to-life journalism drama *All the President's Men*, from 1976, in which he played reporter Bob Woodward who, along with Carl Bernstein (played in the film by Dustin Hoffman) broke the Watergate scandal. Redford's career seemed to be shaped around the idea that the best qualities of the American spirit—maybe best defined as a kind of forthright, unassuming honesty—could prevail against corruption and deceit. And he wasn't content to stop at being an actor, producer, and director: he also founded the [Sundance Institute](#), established in 1981 to help independent filmmakers bring their work to a wider audience. In 1985, he expanded Sundance's reach by taking over what was then called the United States Film and Video Festival, and the Sundance Film Festival was born.

All of these are clearly fantastic, laudable accomplishments—yet a laundry list of all the things Redford accomplished in his lifetime isn't really the best way to honor his gifts. To watch Redford in a movie—whether it's *The Sting*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, or the one-man vehicle *All Is Lost*, in which he gave perhaps the greatest of his late performances—is to find yourself yielding to an irresistible magnetic power. Sydney Pollack's 1973 *The Way We Were* was a movie about political ideals, rooted in the history of McCarthyism and the Hollywood Blacklist. Sure it was—but little girls, and big ones too, who saw it in 1973 found themselves wrapped in its swoonworthy cocoon of romance. That's not a negligible thing, it's an important one, especially when we're talking about all the blessings actors can give us. The way Redford's Hubbell Gardiner looks at his long-lost lover, Katie Morosky (played by Barbra Streisand), during a chance reunion on a New York City street is a symphony of adult regret and longing, an acknowledgement that making the right choice always takes something from us. It's a look that says, mournfully, "You can't have everything"—not even in the movies, the place we have so often gone, over the past 100 years or so, to see our own reflection. Redford's face could tell nothing but the truth.

That was true outside of the movies, too. During our interview, Redford spoke of the necessity of [standing up to those in power](#) who seem bent only

on destruction—[not just of the environment](#), but of the very values that we messy, flawed citizens cling to. We try to be generous when it's easier to be selfish, to preserve when it's easier to destroy and consume. “I think you have to maintain hope, because that’s the only life raft you’ve got,” he told me. “Right now, I think hope is more needed than ever, because things seem so hopeless. And if you allow yourself to sink into that feeling, then you’re part of the problem.” He couldn’t have put it more simply. And now that he’s gone, the words really stick.

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7 Ways to Soothe Your Nighttime Anxiety

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



Sweet dreams are more like a pipe dream when 12 a.m. turns into 2 a.m.—and you still can't stop worrying about all the work you have to do, the bills you need to pay, the argument you had with your sister, and the feeling that you maybe, probably, definitely are going to die sooner than you should because of a lack of sleep.

Experts say almost everyone experiences this kind of middle-of-the-night panic at some point. “The most basic and common reason why we get more anxious at night is because of the decrease in the amount of distraction and activity we have going on,” says Michael G. Wetter, a clinical psychologist

and director of psychology in the division of adolescent and young adult medicine at UCLA Medical Center. “Our mind goes off road, and there’s nothing to guide us and keep us on track and focused and feeling productive.”

So what should you do about your racing thoughts at night? Thrash around until the sun comes up? Open your laptop and start chipping away at your to-do list? Or find some way to put those unwanted thoughts to bed?

We asked Wetter and other experts to share their favorite ways to soothe nighttime anxiety.

Carve out “worry time”

A few hours before you turn in for the night, set a timer and spend five minutes making two lists. On one, write down everything you’re worried about that’s within your control: you forgot to call the veterinarian, you didn’t sign your kid’s permission slip, you didn’t finish responding to all your emails. On the other, log the things you can’t do anything about, like the possibility that it will rain during your vacation next week.

“Get everything down on the page, like word vomit,” says Leah Kaylor, a clinical psychologist and author of the forthcoming book *If Sleep Were a Drug: The Science of Sleep Optimization*.

Read More: [The Best Way to Treat Insomnia](#)

When the timer goes off, drop the list of unfinished tasks within your control into your work bag or on your desk, where it will serve as a to-do list for the next day. “You’re telling your brain, ‘Hey, I heard you, and I don’t want these things to be unfinished either,’” Kaylor says. “Now look, I have them down on my to-do list.”

Then, rip up the paper where you logged everything outside of your control, and throw the tiny shreds out. (Or burn them, if you favor theatrics.)

“You’re telling your brain, ‘I heard you, and now I need you to hear me. We can’t do anything about this,’” Kaylor says. Otherwise, your worries will

continue flaring up, she adds. Once you write them down, “they’ll leave you alone,” because your brain will be content that the situation has been acknowledged.

Do some (positive) mental gymnastics

Trying to clear your mind isn’t always the right approach for anxiety. A busy brain keeps anxiety at bay—so distract yourself with soothing mental exercises. One of Kaylor’s favorites: Summoning every single detail from the plot of a beloved TV show, movie, or book. “Try to get in the weeds about it, like if there was this brilliant episode and you somehow lost the script and needed to refilm it,” she says. “It gives your brain something to do: What did the background look like? What were the characters wearing? What was their tone of voice and body language?”

You could also play the alphabet game, which involves picking a category —stores at the mall, animals, vegetables, baby names—and coming up with one word for each letter from A to Z. It’s fun, it’s creative, and it requires enough brainpower to divert your attention from stressful thoughts, Kaylor says. These types of exercises are so calming that people often tell her that they often don’t even make it halfway through the alphabet before falling asleep.

Tap into your five senses

Keep something textured by your bed, like a smooth stone, that you can touch as soon as you start to get anxious. It’s also a good idea to get into the habit of sipping on cool water, listening to soft ambient music, or finding other ways to ground yourself via your five senses.

“For many people, including myself, the sensation of cool bed sheets signals, ‘OK, this is the time where I can just melt into this,’” Wetter says. “Sometimes we dismiss the power of our own sensitivity.” Anchoring yourself in the present moment can pull your mind away from spiraling thoughts, helping you feel at ease instead, he adds.

Get out of bed

Staying under the covers can reinforce the association between bed and stress. “My rule of thumb is that if you know you’re not going to fall asleep in the next 15 to 20 minutes, you should get up,” Kaylor says. Ideally, you’ll relocate into a dim room, since bright lights signal to the brain that it’s time to wake up. Then, do something “very boring,” she advises. “Maybe that looks like adult coloring books, or just very leisurely folding some laundry.”

The key is to avoid anything your brain might register as exciting, like watching an action movie or reading a book you’ll want to finish before dawn. “Do whatever boring activity you’ve selected until you feel sleepy, and then get back into bed,” Kaylor says. Some people will need to get in and out of bed several times over the course of a night, she adds, but with time, you’ll train yourself that the bedroom is for sleeping only—not a place where anxiety rears its ugly head.

Challenge the 3 a.m. distortion effect

When you start spinning out about everything under the sun—or moon—remind yourself that nighttime thoughts are often exaggerated. What might be a run-of-the-mill concern at 2 p.m. morphs into a caricatured version of itself at 2 a.m. that feels beyond impossible and unsolvable.

Wetter suggests quelling these thoughts by telling yourself: “If this still feels urgent in the morning, I’ll deal with it then.”

Read More: [What Doctors Really Think of Sleepmaxxing](#)

“It’s not that you’re ignoring it,” he says. “You’re just not going to act on it in that moment, because that would be an act of impulsion.” Clients often describe firing off emails or otherwise trying to rectify whatever is keeping them up at night—which they regret the next morning, when daylight shrinks those problems back down to their normal stature.

Keep a comfort script nearby

If you're prone to jolting awake in panic, Wetter suggests keeping a written note with a calming message or affirmation affixed to your nightstand. It's another grounding technique that he's found helps people self-soothe quickly. Your note might say something like: "You'll deal with it tomorrow," "It's not as big a deal as you're making it out to be," or "Everything is going to be OK."

"It's your mantra—your affirmation," he says. "It's your self-statement that says, 'It's going to be fine for now; you can deal with it later.' That helps trigger that sense of reasonability, rationality, and calm."

Reframe how you think about waking

When you've been tossing and turning for hours, you'll probably become even more anxious over the idea that your exhaustion is going to ruin the next day. Reframe that catastrophic thinking, Wetter urges. Waking up overnight is a "natural variation" of everyone's sleeping schedule, he says, and the less pressure you put on getting enough rest, the easier it becomes to fall back asleep.

He likens it to the same framework of acceptance that's helpful when you're stuck in traffic: You can't jump out of the car and jog to your destination, or flex your muscles and shove the other vehicles forward. That means you can either choose to be anxious and succumb to an agitated mood, or accept the fact that you're going to get to work when you get there. "You can be angry and anxious and distressed, or you can accept it and say, 'Look, I'm going to be late. Let me listen to some music or a podcast or make a phone call I would have made later in the day,'" he says.

Read More: [Do You Really Store Stress in Your Body?](#)

The same approach applies to being awake at an inopportune time. Instead of ruminating over your inability to sleep, "Tell yourself, 'I'm going to enjoy the moment of calm,'" Wetter advises. "'Maybe I'll read a book,

maybe I'll watch a little TV; I'm not going to force myself to fall asleep. I'm just going to let my body relax.””

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Trump Is Breaking Americans' Trust in Doctors

Spencer is an emergency medicine physician and public health professor at Brown University School of Public Health



In a rambling press conference on Sept. 22, President Donald Trump claimed that acetaminophen use in pregnancy is driving the rise in autism—and then ad libbed his own guidance on childhood vaccines. Watching the President deliver what is widely considered by leading professional organizations as [inaccurate and dangerous](#) medical advice gave me painful flashbacks to the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, when I was working on the frontlines as an emergency physician in New York City. By the time the press conference ended, people on social media were already comparing it to Trump's infamous suggestion in April 2020 that [injecting disinfectant](#) might treat COVID.

To me, though, this was far worse.

Back in 2020, most Americans instinctively knew that drinking or injecting bleach was dangerous. But at his recent press conference, the President stood at the dais and delivered a barrage of falsehoods that might not be obviously false to most Americans—misrepresenting evidence on autism, distorting research on vaccines, and offering a grab bag of unscientific medical opinions. As a physician, a public-health researcher, and a parent, I felt not just frustration but real worry: for the confusion now facing pregnant women, new mothers, and the families trying to navigate these mixed messages in real time.

Back in April, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Secretary of Health and Human Services, promised that by September, the administration would finally explain why autism diagnoses have risen in recent decades. Instead, they delivered political theater disguised as science. Officials leaned on selective citations, cherry-picking studies that fit their conclusion and ignoring the rest. They presented the case as closed, even though they offered no new data, no credible evidence, and nothing that would actually help parents or physicians make better decisions.

The problem wasn't only that the President and the country's top health officials overstated and misrepresented the science. It's that they replaced uncertainty with spectacle, leaving clinicians and families to make sense of the whole thing. And this announcement wasn't limited to acetaminophen. The president riffed on claims so easily disproven that they bordered on absurd: insisting that autism doesn't exist among the Amish, or that Cuba has no access to acetaminophen. Both are flatly false.

Read More: [What to Know About Leucovorin, an Old Drug Rebranded as an Autism Treatment](#)

More troubling to clinicians such as myself were his directives on vaccines. He urged parents to abandon the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's immunization schedule and "space out" shots—a strategy with no evidence of added safety, but one that guarantees more injections, more clinic visits, and less protection against serious diseases. He even suggested splitting the measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine into separate doses,

which [isn't possible](#) in the U.S. because single-dose versions don't exist. And he urged parents to delay the hepatitis B vaccine until age 12, wrongly dismissing the virus as only "sexually transmitted." (The virus can also be transmitted at birth and through small drops of blood on surfaces or skin.) There is no evidence to support any of this. The President even said his recommendations were "based on what I feel." It was reckless guidance from a man with no medical training, delivered from the nation's most powerful podium.

Here's what we actually know about the [association between acetaminophen during pregnancy and autism](#): the evidence is mixed, and plenty of research shows that the link disappears when controlling for genetic and other factors. Some observational studies have found weak associations between frequent acetaminophen use in pregnancy and neurodevelopmental outcomes, including autism and ADHD. Others, including a methodologically robust study of nearly [2.5 million children](#) in Sweden published last year, found no link at all.

One [study](#) even suggested that short-term use—a week or less—was associated with a lower risk of autism compared with mothers who didn't take acetaminophen at all.

The administration ignored that nuance and chose to lean heavily on a recent [research review](#) that suggested a possible association. But association is not causation. That's why professional organizations—including [obstetricians](#) and [experts in high-risk pregnancy care](#)—continue to recommend acetaminophen in pregnancy when clinically indicated. The dangers of untreated fever and pain are immediate and well documented (despite Trump's claims that "nothing bad can happen" if you don't treat fever). The evidence that Tylenol causes autism is not.

Families searching for answers about autism deserve more than soundbites. Autism is complex, shaped by genetic, environmental, and developmental factors. Pretending otherwise doesn't clarify the science—it insults it. Worse, it heaps additional stigma onto parents, especially mothers, who may already wrestle with guilt over decisions made in pregnancy, often while following trusted medical guidance. And by casting blame on the one medication considered safe for treating fevers and pain during pregnancy,

this announcement risks pushing pregnant women toward alternatives like aspirin and ibuprofen—drugs with well-documented dangers for the developing baby.

We all want a clearer understanding of autism's causes. That requires stronger science and sustained funding. On the very day of the press conference, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) announced the creation of an [Autism Data Science Initiative](#) to expand research into the condition. But the administration has gutted broader research budgets and weakened the public-health institutions best positioned to carry that work forward. The result is a hollow contradiction: a narrow expansion in autism research coupled with a systematic dismantling of the infrastructure needed to make sense of it.

The recent announcement only compounds the harm, confusing parents and diverting attention and resources from questions that could actually bring answers. And if the supposed link between acetaminophen and autism collapses under scrutiny—as the evidence to date suggests—then we will have wasted precious time chasing the wrong target. That would be a profound failure not just of science, but of leadership.

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As a physician, I know how this plays out in the emergency room. A pregnant patient with a fever—which itself carries risks for both the mother and the fetus—may now think twice before taking acetaminophen, the one medication consistently recommended as safe by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists for fever during pregnancy. As a father of two young kids, I know the weight of deciding which medicines and vaccines to give them, and the trust it requires in both the science and the system. The President just made those decisions harder and far more dangerous.

Despite the confidence projected on stage—with Trump flatly declaring that pregnant women should never take Tylenol and “just tough it out,” as the nation’s leading health officials nodded behind him—the administration’s own agencies began retreating almost immediately. Within hours, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a [statement](#) acknowledging

there is no conclusive evidence of causation between acetaminophen and autism. Yet that same evening, on Fox News, FDA Commissioner Dr. Marty Makary doubled down, claiming the research review they are leaning on proved a “causal relationship.” It did no such thing.

Even the study’s lead author has been clear on this point, saying that more research was needed “to confirm the association and determine causality.” In other words, the administration is overstating the evidence, the FDA is contradicting itself, and the scientists who actually did the research are saying something altogether different. This kind of incoherence doesn’t just confuse the public. It casts doubt on the very idea that there is such a thing as trustworthy expertise.

This dissonance—between what senior U.S. health officials said on stage, where their follow-up statements hedge, and what professional societies pushing back are saying—leaves patients asking the most corrosive question in medicine: Who should I believe?

This moment isn’t only about Tylenol or even vaccines; it is about how fragile public trust is, and how quickly it can be squandered. Once the idea takes hold that health guidance is shaped by politics rather than evidence, everything becomes suspect. Vaccines. Screenings. Treatments we’ve relied on for decades. The very foundation of public health is the assumption that leaders will tell the truth about what we know and what we don’t.

Despite what we are now hearing from the most powerful health offices in the nation, the science on acetaminophen and autism remains unsettled. What is not unsettled is the damage done when politics masquerades as medicine. Every false certainty erodes the trust that holds the fragile bridge between patients and their doctors. Break that trust, and no study, no drug, no vaccine will be enough to save lives when the next real crisis comes. When politicians play doctor, it’s families who will pay the price.

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The U.S. and India Are Quietly Patching Things Up

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](#).



In [Donald Trump's](#) first term and at the opening of his second, the U.S. President and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi looked to have a special relationship. Similar views on the value of strongman domestic politics and a common aim to check [China's global ambitions](#) made them well-aligned partners. Things have changed. Common interests remain the

bedrock of relations between the U.S. and Modi's India, but the personal trust that helped build their relationship has now [cooled significantly](#).

You might think the biggest source of tension between the two leaders is Trump's search for leverage over Russia's Vladimir Putin—in particular, his bid to halt India's [import of sanctioned Russian oil](#) to force Putin to negotiate an end to the war in Ukraine. But it's another armed conflict that's at the heart of the friction.

When [fighting began](#) in May between India and Pakistan following a [terrorist attack](#) in Indian-controlled Kashmir, Trump leaped at the chance to play peacemaker, and he tasked Vice President J.D. Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio with de-escalating tensions. Despite India's plans for a joint announcement of a deal to end the fighting, Trump claimed personal credit, and Pakistan compounded Modi's anger by suggesting Trump deserved a Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts. Trump then responded to a Pakistani diplomatic charm offensive with lucrative investment deals on energy, cryptocurrencies, and critical minerals. His request that Modi add his support to the U.S. President's [long-standing Nobel ambitions](#) even further alienated the Indian Prime Minister, who began to [express his frustrations](#).

Read More: [How Modi Misread Trump](#)

That's the background for Trump's decision in August to impose [50% tariffs on India](#), ostensibly for its continuing purchases of Russian oil. Modi's response? He accepted an invitation from China's Xi Jinping to [join](#) a number of world leaders, [notably including Putin](#), at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Tianjin meant to highlight China's growing diplomatic clout. It was Modi's first trip to China in seven years. A ride and hour-long chat with Putin in the Russian President's limousine sent a clear message of defiance that India and its leader would not be pushed around by the White House.

Modi's choice to leave Beijing before a triumphalist military parade reflects that permanent interests continue to define the India-China relationship. Washington and Delhi still share a [deep mistrust](#) of China's power and Xi's intent to use it.

Yet there are now signs that Washington and New Delhi are [making progress](#) toward limiting damage to the relationship. In particular, recent developments make it [more likely](#) that the U.S. and India will announce a trade agreement by the end of this year.

Read More: [*How Modi Is Sending Trump a Message*](#)

On the digital front, optimism for a deal rose on Sept. 22 when the two governments [reportedly agreed](#) not to demand information on source code or other proprietary knowledge as a precondition for U.S. companies doing business in India. U.S. negotiators also hope India will drop restrictions on the import of American soy, a [potentially big win for U.S. farmers](#) made anxious by the potential impact of tariffs on the sale of their products, especially as China slows its purchases of American produce. Finally, Modi and Trump [may well meet](#) on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit in Malaysia in October. That would go a long way toward easing tensions and helping negotiators get to yes on a trade deal.

Yet, none of this will restore the personal trust that's been lost between Trump and Modi. Common geopolitical and commercial interests will keep a solid floor under the relationship and continue the longer-term progress of broadening and deepening U.S.-India relations. But the transactional base of relations between the two leaders will continue. New irritants will emerge, as we saw with Trump's recent announcement of a [\\$100,000 fee](#) added to H-1B visas, which [allow](#) high-skilled foreign workers a chance to work in the U.S. About 70% of H-1B visa holders are Indian nationals.

What, Modi must wonder, will Trump come up with next?

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What I Learned From 40 Years of Watching The Golden Girls

Beth Nguyen is the author of two novels and two memoirs, most recently *Owner of a Lonely Heart*



Picture it: Michigan, September 14, 1985. A young Vietnamese girl watches television with her grandmother on a Saturday night. Like everyone in her refugee family, the girl loves TV, which often feels like learning about American life. That night, a new show called *The Golden Girls* airs on NBC. From the first notes of the theme song—*thank you for being a friend*—the girl is hooked. The characters of Dorothy, Blanche, and Rose are in their 50s and Sophia is 80, but the girl feels an immediate connection to them. Perhaps because her own closest relationship is with her grandmother, or because she's used to identifying with characters who look nothing like her. The girl loves everything about these women—how they

laugh and play, how they gather around food to figure out their lives. She doesn't realize that she has watched the pilot episode of what will become one of the most important, iconic TV shows ever. She doesn't know that she will watch *The Golden Girls* again and again, over decades of reruns, DVDs, and streaming, throughout her life.

Readers, that girl was me. I grew up watching these women, never stopped watching, and now, at age 50, I am almost one of them.

If you've seen *The Golden Girls*, you already know why it's been going strong for 40 years, outliving all of the actors involved. *The Golden Girls* is about deep friendship and the (still groundbreaking) specific experience of life for women beyond middle age. It's got biting one-liners, incredible comedic timing and chemistry, and a fantastic '80s Miami aesthetic. Over seven seasons the show covers topics like menopause, elder care, homophobia, estrangement, discrimination, and more. But it always returns to joy, including sex, dating, food, and the refusal to be invisible. The show is about creating family out of friends, and friends out of family. And it's very much about the art and necessity of storytelling.

"Picture it," Sophia often says, launching into a tale of long-ago Sicily when she was a beautiful young peasant girl. "Back in St. Olaf," Rose begins, and we know we're about to enter the magical-realist world of her hometown in Minnesota. Blanche reminisces about the sultry Southern landscape where she grew up. Dorothy talks of growing up in Brooklyn, and life with her yutz of an ex-husband Stan. All of their stories do what stories are supposed to do—arc, show, tell, exaggerate, elevate, teach, contemplate. They allow the girls to understand each other and to make sense of their own lives. And after all, friendships, relationships, and intimacy are built upon the sharing of stories. I didn't know it at the time, but watching and rewatching *The Golden Girls* helped teach me, a girl who wanted to be a writer, about the value of sharing our narratives.

Growing up in a pre-Internet world, I watched TV the way I read books: to escape my own reality, and to learn about others. Back then people would plan their lives around TV schedules, not the other way around. And so I would find myself on many a Saturday night watching *The Golden Girls* with my grandmother, sitting in front of a little TV that accessed network

stations with an antenna. I was 8 months old when my family came to the U.S.; in 1985 we were 10 years settled into post-refugee life in the American Midwest, where, increasingly, the only time I spoke Vietnamese was with my grandmother. I thought there was nothing *Golden Girls* about her except age, though later it occurred to me that, like Sophia, Blanche, and Rose, my grandmother was also a widow. She had started over in new cities and homes. And *The Golden Girls* was very much about four women learning to begin again.

In the last episode of season one, titled “The Way We Met,” Dorothy, Blanche, and Rose are wide awake in the middle of the night, so they eat cheesecake and reminisce about how they came to be friends and roommates. As always, each woman is dressed to character: Dorothy’s robe is comfortable and practical; Blanche’s is silky and sexy; Rose’s is soft and cozy. The episode begins and ends in the kitchen, but most of it is storytelling through flashback scenes. This is what the girls do best. Each time I return to them—this scene, this setting, this dialogue that I almost know by heart—I feel at home.

We call it comfort watching for a reason, and for me *The Golden Girls* is the ultimate comfort. I feel like I’m being invited into their lives and onto their lanai. I understand their sorrows, their family worries, their relationship woes. I have, in a very real sense, grown with them. At some point, the jokes I didn’t get when I was a kid made hilarious sense.

(Blanche: “I was wearing little black French lace panties bearing the words bonjour!” Pause. “Or was it bon appetit?”) The anxiety of aging, like when Dorothy wistfully says that age 40 now seems young to her, became more real.

When *The Golden Girls* ended, in May 1992, with Dorothy getting married and moving away, I was about to graduate from high school and go to college. In the finale, the girls struggle to say goodbye. As Rose puts it, “What can you say about seven years of fights and laughter, secrets, cheesecake?” The fade to black is tearful. Still to this day, it makes me want to cry. To this day, I hate that everything has to end. The Girls are not ageless but, in the way of shows and movies that endure, they seem to exist

outside of time. They are permanently beautiful and lively, always getting into the same scrapes, telling the same wild stories from their youth.

My grandmother has been gone for more than 15 years now. I don't know if she watched *The Golden Girls* in syndication after I left home. Sometimes I wonder if I'm looking for her in the feeling of that show when I rewatch it. I think about those Saturday nights in her company, in the lamplight of her room. How she would knit and I would do homework or we'd work on a puzzle together while watching TV. How soft our world felt then, if only for half an hour.

If we are lucky, we will all get to be Golden Girls. Wouldn't it be lovely to know that if we woke up in the middle of the night we could throw on our robes—satin, cotton, terry, chenille, depending on who we are and how we're feeling—and go into the kitchen where people who love us would be ready with cake and ice cream, ready to share stories and gossip? In *The Golden Girls*, there's always one spot open at the kitchen table. One day I realized that it's for us, the audience. We all get to be there, laughing together, contemplating the people we once knew, the people we once were, the people we are still becoming. I can't think of a better way to get through the night.

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NASA Discovery Is the ‘Closest We Have Ever Come to Discovering Life on Mars’

Kluger is an editor at large at TIME. He covers space, climate, and science. He is the author of 12 books, including *Apollo 13*, which served as the basis for the 1995 film, and was nominated for an Emmy Award for TIME's series [A Year in Space](#).



When the [Perseverance rover](#) landed in Mars’s Jezero crater—a formation that long ago was Jezero lake—in February, 2021 it turned west. West is where the riverbeds, the deltas, the sites of ancient gushing water once were. In July, 2024, after covering [18 miles](#) in nearly three and a half years, it arrived at a quarter-mile-wide river valley that is home to a 3.2-ft.-long rock NASA scientists have dubbed [Cheyava Falls](#)—and there it hit paydirt.

As a [new paper](#) in *Nature* reports, a sample Perseverance drilled from the rock may contain potential biosignatures of long ago microbial life.

“This finding by [Perseverance](#)...is the closest we have ever come to discovering life on Mars,” said acting NASA administrator Sean Duffy in a [statement](#). “The identification of a potential biosignature on the Red Planet is a groundbreaking discovery, and one that will advance our understanding of Mars.”

Perseverance did not discover fossilized microbes and it surely didn’t discover living ones. What it found was a rock streaked in a range of colors—red, green, purple, and blue—flecked with poppy-seed-like dots and decorated with what the Perseverance scientists compared to dull yellow leopard spots. That said a lot. As the rover’s instruments confirmed, the red is iron-rich mud, the purple is iron and phosphorous, the yellow and green are iron and sulfur. All of those elements serve as something of a chow line for hungry microbes.

[video id=ScVZuRfD]

The poppy seeds and leopard spots, meantime, resemble markings left behind by metabolizing microbes on Earth. When the rover trained its instruments on those features they detected two iron-rich minerals—vivianite and greigite. On Earth, vivianite is frequently found in peat bogs and around decaying organic matter—another item on the microbes’ menu. And both minerals can be produced by microbial life. Images of the rock with its distinctive features were beamed back to Earth by Perseverance, while X-ray and laser sensors analyzed the chemistry of the markings.

Read more: [Ancient Microbes Could Still Be Living on Mars](#)

“What’s exciting about these finds,” said Joel Hurowitz, lead author of the *Nature* paper and a member of the Perseverance science team, at a Sept. 10 press conference, “[is that] this sort of combination of mud and organic matter...is what we see in sediment on Earth. These minerals are often the byproduct of microbial metabolisms that are consuming organic matter and making these minerals as a result of those reactions.”

“Astrobiological claims, particularly those related to the potential discovery of past extraterrestrial life, require extraordinary evidence,” said Katie Stack Morgan, Perseverance’s project scientist, in a statement. “Getting such a significant finding as a potential biosignature on Mars into a peer-reviewed publication is a crucial step in the scientific process because it ensures the rigor, validity, and significance of our results.”

But those results are by no means a closed book. The wording used to describe the find—“potential biosignature”—is a very precise term of art. A potential biosignature, as NASA wrote in its [release](#), is “a substance or structure that might have a biological origin but requires more data or further study before a conclusion can be reached about the absence or presence of life.” In other words, hold the Nobel.

“There are non-biological ways to make these features that we cannot completely rule out,” said Hurowitz at the press conference. “So what we need to do from here is to continue to do additional research in laboratory settings here on Earth, and ultimately bring the sample that we collected from this rock back home to Earth, so that we can make the final determination for what process actually gave rise to these fantastic textures.”

Bringing samples of the rock home is very much on NASA’s exploratory agenda. Perseverance was launched with 43 small titanium tubes that it has been filling with soil and rock and leaving on the surface like a bread crumb trail. The sample Hurowitz mentioned was one such cached bit of Mars. For decades, NASA has been talking about a [Mars Sample Return \(MSR\)](#) mission, and Perseverance was intended to be the first step in that game of fetch. But the next steps have never been fully planned. NASA has envisioned landing another small rover on Mars that would chase after Perseverance, collect the samples the larger rover has left on the surface, and bring them to a return ship that would blast off of Mars and carry them up to an [Earth-Return Orbiter](#) (ERO)—built by the European Space Agency—which would be waiting for the precious cargo. The ERO would then carry the sample tubes home.

Despite the fact that Perseverance has been diligently filling its tubes and leaving them on the surface, none of the other hardware for the complicated

MSR relay has been built. And the new administration may be further hampering those plans. In Early May, [President Donald Trump issued a budget request](#) that would slash NASA's funding by 24%, with multiple programs being scaled back or canceled. MSR is one of the ones that got the ax. Congress, of course, still has to approve of Trump's request, and at Wednesday's press conference Duffy was asked about MSR's future.

Read more: [*NASA's Mars Rover Mission to Bring Samples Back Home From the Red Planet Is at Risk*](#)

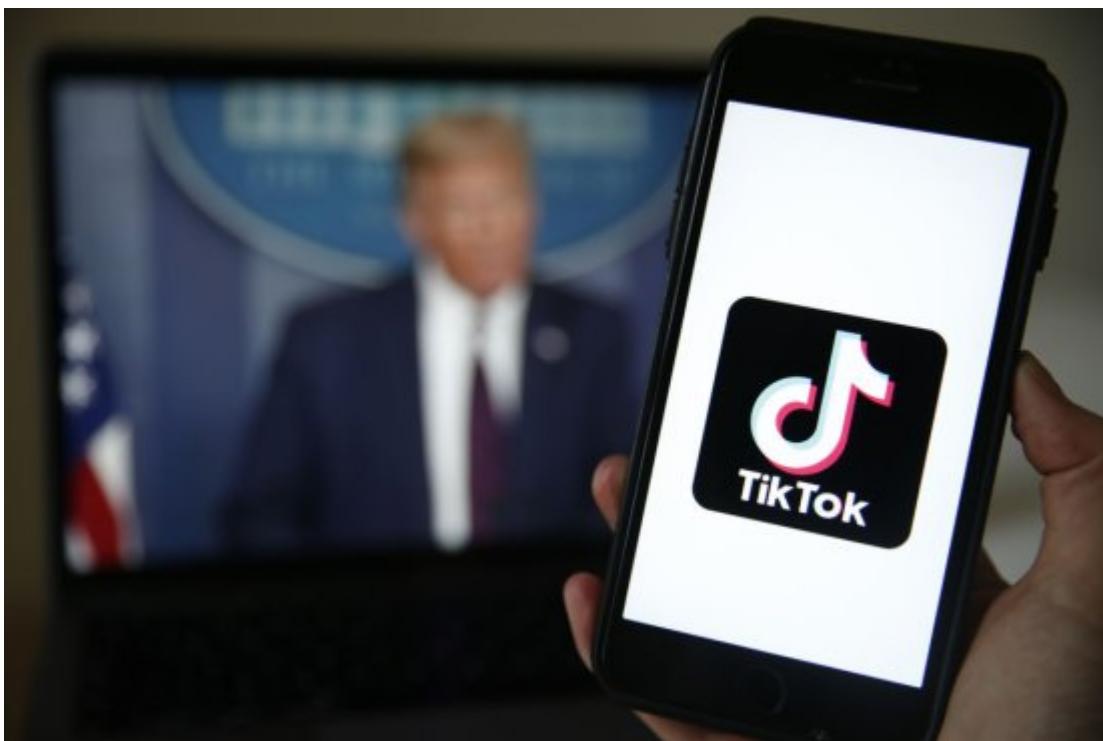
“What we’re going to do is look at our budgets,” he said. “We’re going to look at our timing. And, you know, how do we spend money better? And what technology do we have to get samples back more quickly? And so that’s a current analysis that’s happening right now. Again, what is the best way to do it?”

That’s not a ringing endorsement for MSR, but it’s not a no either. As Washington debates the future of the space agency, the Perseverance team can only go about its business, sending its rover this way and that, to sniff out clues to Mars’s ancient past. The planet may once have been living—far below the surface, in underground aquifers, it could still be living. The latest findings are one more sign that we may not have always been alone in the solar system.

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Critics Warn the TikTok Deal Swaps Chinese Surveillance for U.S. Surveillance

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



The Trump administration is closing in on a deal with the Chinese government to transfer TikTok into American hands. White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt [told Fox News](#) on Saturday that she was “100% confident that a deal is done,” and that the app’s data, privacy and algorithm would be controlled by American ownership.

The deal is the result of a bill that Congress passed last year, based on fears that China was collecting the user data of Americans and using the platform

for surveillance and propaganda. But while many Americans are celebrating the deal as a victory for user privacy rights and national security, some cybersecurity experts still have concerns. They contend that TikTok's new structure, based on the scant details that have emerged about the deal, could open up users to surveillance and influence not from China—but the American government itself.

"Giving the government more power to surveil its own people or to do large data collections is not a good thing," says David Kennedy, a cybersecurity expert and the founder of TrustedSec and Binary Defense. "We're just basically switching one government for another."

Data security

While the deal has yet to be formalized, the White House laid out several details in a statement on Monday obtained by [Bloomberg](#). At least 80% of TikTok U.S. will be American-owned, with a [consortium](#) of investors led by Oracle, Silver Lake, and Andreessen Horowitz. Trump [said](#) on Fox News Sunday that Rupert Murdoch and his son Lachlan would likely be involved. ByteDance, TikTok's original Chinese parent company, would keep a minority stake. The data of 170 million U.S. users will be kept on Oracle servers in Texas.

Read More: [*What Users Should Know About the TikTok Deal*](#)

The location of TikTok's data centers has been a major point of contention for years. Last year, the Department of Justice [alleged](#) that TikTok was storing sensitive U.S. customer data on Chinese servers. This would pose a problem if the Chinese government was then taking the data and using it to learn about the American public and build dossiers for blackmail or espionage.

[video id=nrcRJidF]

TikTok has [disputed](#) the accusation that the government can access user data, and that it collects more data than other social media companies. In 2023, TikTok CEO Shou Chew [testified](#) before the U.S. Congress that "100

percent of U.S. user traffic is being routed to Oracle” and a U.S. TikTok subsidiary.

Cybersecurity experts say that Oracle’s oversight of consumer data under the new deal goes a long way in assuaging some concerns. “Now we have U.S. regulations helping to protect American data,” says Dave Chronister, the CEO of the cybersecurity company Parameter Security.

But Beijing has [plenty](#) of other ways to access American data, including buying it from data brokers. Samm Sacks, a senior fellow at New America who specializes in Chinese technology policy, points out that before the ban, TikTok was already in the process of strengthening data privacy through Project Texas. This initiative [proposed](#) protecting American user data in an American subsidiary managed on Oracle’s cloud, and conducting regular third-party audits of data privacy and security.

It is unclear how many of those proposals will be implemented into this new system. “All of that under Project Texas was quite robust: there was a separate source code inspection entity and separate cybersecurity firms that were involved,” says Sacks. “So I’d want to understand to what extent you have other independent vetting.”

Surveillance

The other main concern of ByteDance critics was with the company’s algorithm itself, and how China might be wielding it for propaganda. (A federal appeals court wrote in December that the U.S. government had [provided no evidence](#) of these claims.) In 2020, the Chinese government signaled the algorithm’s importance when they [updated](#) export control rules to cover sensitive technologies including TikTok’s personalized recommendation engine.

In this new deal, Oracle will also retrain a licensed version of ByteDance’s algorithm “from the ground up,” and “will operate, retrain, and continuously monitor the U.S. algorithm to ensure content is free from improper manipulation or surveillance,” the White House statement said.

While the White House statement says the new arrangement would completely strip any Chinese influence over the algorithm, it's unclear whether that is technically feasible. And there have been conflicting reports about this transfer: One U.S. adviser told the *[Financial Times](#)* last week that "China keeps the algorithm."

"The devil is in the details. If we're able to modify it, that's one thing," says Chronister. "But if they're allowing it to be exported and we use it as is, it doesn't change anything. The cynical part of me says that China is okay with it because the algorithm isn't going to change."

Some cybersecurity experts worry that China will retain too much power under the new arrangement. Others, however, worry that the U.S. government will have the power to control this new licensed algorithm and view user data—raising its own set of concerns, since Trump himself could theoretically influence what content the platform elevates or buries.

Many of the leaders of this new consortium have close ties to President Trump: Oracle's Larry Ellison has hosted fundraisers for the president, while former leaders at Andreessen Horowitz are now a [part](#) of the White House. Ellison's son, David, now runs one of the biggest media companies in the world, Paramount Skydance, thanks to a recent merger approved by Trump's FCC. In July, Trump [claimed](#) he struck a side deal which netted him \$20 million worth of PSAs of his choosing on their networks. Paramount disputed the claim.

And the new rules stipulate that TikTok U.S.'s new board must have one member designated by the U.S. government. All of this makes it seem like the U.S. government will hold inordinate power over the decision-making at TikTok U.S. (Coincidentally or not, the White House just launched its [own TikTok account](#) last month.)

"If the government wants to ensure appropriate safeguards, then it should pass government standards or federal laws on social media companies, not have a specific government entity on the board itself," Kennedy says. "That seems like a very bad separation of power and duty."

Kennedy, a former hacker for the NSA, says that the U.S. government already uses social media all the time to surveil suspects, and worries that these close ties will make it even easier for the government to weaponize TikTok. “All that data out there itself is very easy for the government to obtain and then use against its own people,” he says.

Larry Ellison, for his part, has endorsed this vision of the future: At an Oracle meeting in 2024, he envisioned a new era of AI surveillance in which “we are constantly recording,” causing police and citizens to “be on their best behavior.”

Sacks also says that the deal should be examined in the larger context of U.S.-China trade relations. “Beijing knows that Trump really wanted to bring home a win,” she says. “I think there are now questions about what Beijing is looking to extract by greenlighting TikTok.”

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How Ukraine Gamified Drone Warfare

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 Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's compound in Kyiv as the Russian invasion unfolded.



The Brief September 25, 2025

What we know so far about the suspected shooter at a Dallas ICE facility, how Ukraine gamified drone warfare, and more

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Podcast ID – Long Length: 170b5a8e-f0e0-46b7-9c9e-d0511aa839a5

One afternoon this spring, Mykhailo Fedorov, a minister in the wartime government of Ukraine, turned up the volume on his laptop and played a video to illustrate his latest innovation. Its purpose, he explained, was to make the experience of combat feel more like a video game to Ukrainian troops—or as he put it, “to gamify” the war.

The clip showed a series of aerial strikes, each filmed from the vantage of a combat drone. One of them, apparently flying by night, had used its thermal-imaging camera to detect an enemy soldier in what looked like a field or forest. It was difficult to tell, because the background was dark and the figure in the frame resembled a white blob more than a human being. The Russian soldier seemed to freeze in place as the drone hovered. Then it dropped its explosive charge, and a shower of sparks burst outward from the spot where the man had been. “That’s six points,” Fedorov told me. “It used to be only four.”

A few weeks earlier, Fedorov had tweaked the algorithm he controls to increase the number of points the Ukrainian military’s drone units receive for killing a Russian soldier. The result of the change, he said, had been astonishing: “The kill count doubled in a month.”

At 34, Fedorov is one of the youngest members of President Volodymyr Zelensky’s war council, a square-jawed fitness enthusiast who likes to wear a black baseball cap over his crew cut. His office in central Kyiv feels as if it might be a frat house at MIT, with free weights and other workout gear surrounding the minister’s desk. On the day I visited, small drones stood on the shelves in various stages of assembly, their colorful wires and circuit boards exposed.



Over the past 3½ years of war, drones have done more than any other weapons to help Ukraine defend itself. They now account for about two-thirds of battlefield deaths in a war of attrition that has, by U.S. estimates, killed or wounded hundreds of thousands of troops. Ukraine has deployed drones by the millions, turning what began as a battle of tanks and artillery into a high-tech proving ground for the world's deadliest gadgets. Fedorov, the country's Minister of Digital Transformation, has played a key role in shaping the strategy. His latest scheme, known as the Army of Drones bonus program, brings elements of Roblox and *Fortnite* to both the blood-soaked realm of real-life combat and the arid one of weapons acquisition.

Read More: [How Putin Brushed Off Trump's Latest Push For Peace In Ukraine.](#)

The program established a system for Ukrainian drone units to document their strikes. Each confirmed kill receives a set of bonus points

corresponding to the value that Fedorov, in consultation with the military brass, assigns to the targets. Around the time we met, destroying a Russian tank was worth 40 points. A multiple-rocket launcher was up to 50 points, depending on the type. At the end of each month, an official review board of experts and officers verifies each strike, tallies the points, and releases a list of the best-scoring teams. The points can be redeemed to order more advanced drones on a digital marketplace known as Brave1, which Fedorov's ministry oversees.

Many of Brave1's offerings are classified. But the public part of the platform lists hundreds of items for sale. Among the more popular is the Vampire drone, a heavy bomber with six rotors, which can be redeemed for 43 points. Fedorov says that logistics teams take about 10 days, on average, to deliver the purchased items, which the drone units use to carry out more strikes and amass more points.

Beyond its use as a motivational tool, the Army of Drones program allows the high command in Kyiv to adjust the targets their forces prioritize. If Ukraine needs to wear down the number of Russian artillery pieces, for instance, Fedorov can increase the number of points granted for destroying them. "In a war of technologies," he told me, "nothing is more valuable than a clear understanding of what gear is going to get you the best results. Now we see it in real time—what's working, what's not."

The Pentagon has taken notice. At the U.S. base in Wiesbaden, Germany, senior military officers have observed the program and drawn lessons from its success, one of them told me. It can take years, this U.S. official says, for the Army to order, receive, and deploy new weapons through the Defense Department's system of procurement. "Our process is bigger and more cumbersome, more legalistic," says the officer, who asked not to be identified, in keeping with military protocol. The Ukrainians, says the U.S. official, found a way to shrink that timeline down to a week using a military version of Amazon Prime, where commanders at the front can order what they need directly from arms manufacturers. "That's something we look at and say, 'Wow, could we do that?'"

Ukraine's gamification of war may be the natural terminus of a tech culture that gamifies everything. Apps have learned that designing their interfaces

this way increases user engagement, whether the purpose is learning a language or training for a marathon or getting better at chess. So in a sense it's no surprise that Fedorov, the digital minister, would introduce a program like this in a country whose very existence now hinges on the ability to integrate cutting-edge tech into war. But turning lethal combat into a competition creates moral challenges on an entirely new scale, and solving them does not seem high on Ukraine's present list of priorities.

I first heard about the bonus program about a year ago, when the founder of a Ukrainian drone unit joined me for lunch in Kyiv's trendy district of Podil. Once the waiter had set two bowls of borscht on our table, my companion looked around the restaurant with an air of conspiracy and handed me his phone. "Check this out," he said.

The screen showed the first monthly ranking in the bonus program, with his group in the top 10. "Think of it as an antidote to bulls-t," he told me. By verifying strikes through video footage, it prevents units from falsifying their numbers in reports to the high command. It also serves "as a type of stimulus," said the founder, who asked me not to identify him or the name of his unit for security reasons. "When other stimuli are running out, when people are getting tired, they find it hard to keep going on patriotism alone. So this gives them an extra push, an extra incentive."



The Russians, faced with similar problems of flagging morale, have come up with a cruder response. Cash payments are handed out to Russian soldiers for their successes on the battlefield, with a destroyed tank or a conquered village potentially earning them thousands of dollars, according to Russian media reports and official statements. Battlefield injuries, like severed limbs, are likewise rewarded with sums that most soldiers could not earn in regular jobs.

Ukraine cannot afford that strategy. Its defense spending already amounts to more than 30% of its GDP, higher than any other nation in the world, according to the budget committee of the Ukrainian parliament. It has barely enough money to pay military salaries, let alone dole out bonuses. But in the summer of 2023, when Fedorov first suggested his system of gamification, top military brass rejected the concept. “The idea seemed insane to them,” he says.

Nearly a year passed before Fedorov got his chance to present the proposal at a meeting of Zelensky’s war council. The president listened to the pitch,

nodded his head, and gave an order to the generals in the room: “Make it happen.”

Read More: [*The Hidden War Over Ukraine’s Lost Children.*](#)

In August 2024, when the bonus program began, some of the top drone units in Ukraine refused to participate. Among the holdouts was Lasar’s Group, a secretive outfit whose commander, a former TV news producer named Pavlo “Lasar” Yelizarov, saw gamification as a symptom of inertia in the high command. “In a professional army, there should be internal mechanisms for assessing the quality of strikes, motivating forces, and deciding who gets more drones,” Yelizarov told me. Instead, Ukraine has relied on a game designed by civilians to rank and reward its best commanders. Yelizarov admits the game has made Ukraine’s drone warfare more efficient. But it has also come with risks, he says: “It concentrates all this sensitive data in one document, and it can fall into the wrong hands.”

Over the course of the program, such concerns have been validated. At first, the list of top-scoring teams would leak to the media at the end of every month. Later it began appearing on the Brave1 website, allowing the winners to advertise their lethality. Yelizarov saw such publicity as dangerous. “It reveals the leading figures among our drone units,” he says, “and that helps the Russians set priorities for whom to target.”

But in the view of most drone commanders, the value of the program outweighs these risks. Many of Ukraine’s military units rely on private fundraising to help supply the equipment they need. Fedorov’s Army of Drones program provided a form of free advertising, and few could resist the temptation to exploit it. Some of the drone commanders styled themselves as warrior-celebrities, appearing on talk shows and printing hats and T-shirts with their unit’s logos.

Even Lasar’s Group came around. After joining at the end of last year, it became a fixture of the leaderboard. Yelizarov’s name soon leaked to the media. In August, he agreed to appear on the cover of the Ukrainian edition of *Forbes*, which reported that his unit had destroyed Russian targets worth a total of \$12 billion. “Lasar’s Group has changed the rules of battle,”

trumpeted its latest promotional video, which Yelizarov sent me in September. “We showed the way that units of the future work.”

Last fall, when the Army of Drones game was in its second month, one of Ukraine’s leading drone units invited me to take a tour of their headquarters. At the time, its staff of several hundred men included dozens of strike teams, each with a drone pilot, a navigator, and several crew members. The pilots tended to operate from a safe distance, hunting their targets through computer screens or virtual reality goggles.

A handful of them, dressed in camouflage, stood up and saluted when one of their commanding officers brought me into their control room. Some looked to be in their teens. “If they have experience with PlayStation, that’s a big plus,” the commander told me, “because they already know how to use the controllers.” I asked what other forms of experience good pilots tend to have. “Gamers, basically,” said the commander, who asked that his name and the name of the unit be withheld for security reasons. “We get a lot of young dudes from the IT sector.”

For such recruits, the unit has been an attractive place to serve. Its fundraising efforts have allowed it to become “practically autonomous,” the commander told me. The base in Kyiv has a dedicated personnel department to recruit new troops, its own training program to educate them, and its own budget to pay their salaries.

Down the hall from the cafeteria, we came across the office of the unit’s in-house psychologist, who helps the men deal with trauma and post-traumatic stress. The psychologist told me his patients mostly seek help after trips to the front, where they experience the violence of the war up close. The pilots, by contrast, seldom show signs of psychological damage. “It’s more abstract to them,” he said. “It’s not so close.”

Read More: [Zelensky on Trump, Putin, and the Endgame In Ukraine.](#)

This distance, both emotional and physical, has been among the advantages of waging the war with drones. In place of men, Ukraine has increasingly used machines to fend off Russian assaults, preserving the lives of its

soldiers and civilians. But the approach may also carry a cost, one hard to discern in the middle of a grinding conflict.

“We want our people to come back from the war as human beings, not as killing machines,” says Gyunduz Mamedov, a former Ukrainian prosecutor who now leads war-crimes investigations and serves as an adviser to the armed forces on the ethics of drone warfare. “Some of these new systems make that more difficult, because the war can start to feel less real.” The next frontier in wartime technology, Mamedov says, will be artificial intelligence. The Brave1 marketplace already offers a variety of ways to upgrade a drone with AI software, which can be used for targeting, navigation, and other functions. The newest models of the Vampire drone, which is produced by a Ukrainian company called Skyfall, allows pilots to switch on AI mode midflight, effectively handing over the controls to an algorithm.

The drone’s developer, who also requested anonymity, has not yet made fully autonomous targeting available to the units that buy the Vampire. “We have the technology,” he told me during a recent tour of the Skyfall factory, which has the capacity to produce around 4,000 Vampires per month. “But I think we need to have a solid error-prevention mechanism in place before we allow a drone to make that decision about when to fire,” he says. “Who takes responsibility if the drone opens fire and ends up killing civilians?”

For Ukraine’s drone units, such questions can seem academic. Some already have begun to experiment with AI-enabled targeting systems that can decide when to fire. Those drones can participate in the bonus program. “A kill is a kill,” Fedorov told me.

As Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine nears its fourth anniversary, a few of Fedorov’s allies have suggested expanding the bonus program in disturbing ways. One drone developer cited the technology from a sci-fi novel called *Ender’s Game*, in which children are trained to unwittingly pilot swarms of drones in a space war. The young pilots are told they are only playing a game. “Technically, something like that is already feasible,” the developer told me. A drone pilot could sit anywhere in the world and operate their weapons at a distance, not knowing whether their screens are showing them a simulation of combat or an actual feed from the front. “At this point

it's just a thought experiment," says the developer. "But things could go in that direction."

Fedorov wants to use the bonus program to drive innovation, especially in the field of air defense, which has been one of Ukraine's key vulnerabilities. In August, Russia launched more than 4,000 attack drones against Ukrainian targets, killing scores of civilians. The missiles used to shoot them down are effective, but they are often far more expensive than the drones themselves. In response, Fedorov raised the number of points awarded for shooting Russian drones out of the sky, and Ukrainian manufacturers have been developing cheap drones that can be used as interceptors. "It's a new kind of air defense," says Fedorov. "We're just creating the incentives to build it." For enough points, he says, the drone teams will find a way.

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Inside the Push to Totally Reimagine the Banking Industry's Climate Strategy

Worland is a senior correspondent at TIME, based 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.



This spring, as global markets gyrated, some of the world's most influential investors and executives sat in a Scottsdale, Ariz., conference room engaged in deep discussion. But rather than President Donald Trump's tariffs, the 120 attendees were focused on the future of energy, [climate](#), and sustainability. Across the conference ballroom were individuals representing a combined \$4.3 trillion in market capitalization and \$4.2 trillion in assets under management. At my table sat JPMorgan Chase & Co. CEO Jamie Dimon, Microsoft founder turned philanthropist Bill Gates, and Jim Farley, the CEO of the Ford Motor Co. Elsewhere in the room, I spotted an oil-and-gas CEO, a prominent clean-tech innovator, and some of the world's biggest asset managers.

For all the financial might, there was hardly any hype or grandeur. Walking around the campus of the Four Seasons Resort in Scottsdale, there was little indication of the gathering's host or its purpose. A logo on the wall simply read Scottsdale Action Forum. But at the center of the room Dimon, the conference host, sat watching intently all day.

To many casual climate observers, it may look as if the world's biggest companies in the financial sector and beyond are shunning climate work because the political zeitgeist has made it inconvenient. But the truth is far more complicated. Global markets and regulatory pressures keep the issue on the corporate radar. Meanwhile, out of the public eye, executives continue to search for a path forward. It's just unlikely that they will settle on the path everyone envisioned five years ago.

"We have an issue; we should face it," Dimon told the crowd about the world's growing carbon emissions. But at the same time, he said, the U.S. needs a "more rational conversation" than how the climate dialogue is often framed. "We have to have a full, honest assessment."

For JPMorgan, that has meant affirming its commitment to financing oil and gas and acknowledging that it may not meet the bold climate targets it set in 2021 if the broader economic and policy landscape doesn't change. At the same time, the firm hasn't given up on efforts to build a green banking business or the push to drive global emissions reductions. In fact, the company's corporate clients continue to demand they do so no matter the political winds.

“There is a huge market for clean energy that’s profitable. It’s not a giveaway,” Dimon told me when we spoke again in July. In his telling, rational energy solutions cannot mean that banks “make loans that are going to go bad” or “stop financing people who provide safe, reliable, affordable energy.”

JPMorgan is far from the only financial institution trying to thread this needle. For much of the past decade, the industry has occupied a central role in efforts to tackle climate change. In what I’ve taken to calling the Wall Street fix, climate advocates have sought to make banks, insurers, and other financial institutions central players in efforts to cut emissions. In the simplest terms, the theory goes, the financial sector can bring about the energy transition by financing good things, i.e., clean energy, and cutting funding for fossil fuels.

During the pandemic, banks announced targets to show their commitment to climate action. But politics—and markets—have been rocked by events ranging from the Russian invasion of Ukraine to the U.S. presidential election. This dynamic means the financial sector is caught fighting two distinct battles on the same front. Conservatives say banks have “gone woke,” unfairly favoring renewable energy, and have threatened firms with lawsuits and investigations. At the same time, some climate groups argue that JPMorgan, with its substantial funding of oil and gas, has failed to do its part. Indeed, climate scenarios show clearly that the world needs to shift away from fossil fuels to meet climate goals. Many with less fixed views have come to think the most influential companies have simply given up.

If the crowd in Scottsdale is any indicator, the private sector remains engaged. Many of the most influential corporate and financial players have modulated their public messaging and adjusted their climate-friendly work, but they are very far from abandoning it. The conversation in April centered not on the need to advance clean technologies—that’s taken as a given—but rather on how to do so profitably in line with client and investor expectations. “How much money is invested at below-market return for green purposes? Like none. Zero,” said Dimon. “It’s not going to work if it’s just for philanthropy.”

Indeed, getting capital to flow will require a society-wide shift. And while they may not have all the answers, one clear conclusion was reached in Scottsdale: profit will be the easiest way to make the Wall Street fix real.

At a conference table on the 41st floor of JPMorgan's headquarters in Manhattan, Doug Petno is flexing his fluency across the languages of climate, finance, and old-school oil and gas. He speaks about addressing climate change as “existential,” but also hails natural gas as “one of the biggest decarbonizing forces for the U.S.” because of its role in replacing dirtier coal. He mentions leveraged buyouts and nature protection in the same breath.

Petno, a rumored potential successor to Dimon and co-CEO of JPMorgan’s commercial and investment bank, began his career at the firm 35 years ago helping structure deals in the natural resources division. But by the early 2010s the firm began to get pushback—from both activists and clients—for financing the polluting sector.

So Petno, with the support of the company’s other senior executives, began exploring how to advance the company’s sustainability strategy—not for the marketing or government-relations divisions but for the company’s core business. “We wanted to build our franchise in a sustainable way that would be climate smart, carbon smart, apolitical, science-based, but fundamentally do what we do best as a bank,” Petno says.

To respond to banker and customer questions about climate change and evolving energy markets, Petno set up a brain trust of sorts with a new internal advisory hub dubbed the Center for Carbon Transition. Senior bankers were pulled in from across the firm and tasked with studying climate change and the energy transition. The center became home for climate scientists, dozens of whom are now employed across JPMorgan.

And then there’s the firm’s green-economy banking practice, designed to service clients in the clean-technology sector with subject matter expertise, including scientists and engineers, as well as leading bankers in the field. Petno says that at the time of its launch, the bank knew the sector would be cyclical—“feast or famine,” to use his words—but investments were

nonetheless meant to be as profit-oriented as they were climate-oriented. Last year, JPMorgan generated more than \$1 billion in revenue from green transactions and clients.

But activist pressure has remained consistent. Following the adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015, the Rainforest Action Network activist group rated the bank as the world's biggest financier of fossil fuels—a title that the bank retained as of last year. In 2018, in one prominent demonstration, protesters chained themselves to a sculpture in one of the company's New York offices over its financing of oil pipelines Climate activist Bill McKibben once called Dimon an “oil, coal, and gas baron almost without peer.” Indeed, even with the bank's growing climate investments, a fundamental mismatch remained. What is rational to a bank isn't necessarily rational for the planet—and humanity. The planet needs us to cut emissions; banks need to continue making a profit.



In the first years of the COVID-19 pandemic, the activist pressure and profit motive seemed to be aligning. Combined with low interest rates, investor demands, and policy pushes, companies and financial firms made a series of bold climate commitments. Today, it feels almost like a hazy dream: financial firms committed not only to eliminating their own emissions but to cutting their financed emissions, i.e. customer emissions that result from the firm's financing. Financial sector leaders like BlackRock's Larry Fink and Bank of America's Brian Moynihan showed up to the U.N. climate

conference in Glasgow in November of 2021 in full force promising to support the global net-zero push.

Dimon himself skipped Glasgow, but the bank still came to the conference with a series of splashy commitments. Those included a pledge to align JPMorgan's funding in key sectors with a pathway to a net-zero-carbon-emissions world and a goal of financing \$1 trillion in green initiatives by 2030. At the time, the firm joined with its biggest counterparts in coalitions like the Net Zero Banking Alliance (NZBA) and Climate Action 100+.

Even still, to activist dismay, at no point did JPMorgan say it would stop financing fossil fuels. In his 2020 annual letter, Dimon had said that JPMorgan would continue to work with oil and gas firms and argued that "abandoning companies that produce and consume these fuels is not a solution." Dimon's approach proved prescient. In 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine and energy prices soared. The Biden Administration went from talking about the decline of oil and gas to pushing companies to produce more. Around the same time, political backlash to parts of the E.U.'s Green Deal led to the bloc's softening green policies. Supply-chain crunches slowed key technologies. And then there was Trump's return to power.

JPMorgan tries to exude an aggressively nonpartisan and apolitical attitude even as the financial sector's approach to climate has become a lightning rod in Washington and in statehouses around the country. When I talked to Dimon just after the passage of Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill Act, which gutted most Biden-era clean-energy programs, he declined to endorse or reject the measure, saying it contained some good things and some bad things. To be clear, every analysis of the law's climate impact shows U.S. emissions will be higher than they would have been without its passage.

Many casual observers conclude that the private sector—banks and big companies alike—has given up. But is it true?

What's clear is that JPMorgan and the sector more broadly have fallen behind their targets. Between its 2021 pledge and now, the firm has financed \$240 billion in climate initiatives. That's not a small sum by any measure, but still doesn't put it on track to meet its \$1 trillion goal, the deadline for which is just five years away. Petno acknowledged the company might not

meet its target. “It’s going to depend a little on how open and receptive the capital markets are,” he told me.

Read more: [*The Rise of Green Wall Street*](#)

It’s much the same across the sector. Many of the biggest banks have moved away from rigid portfolio-wide pledges toward looser guardrails and deal-by-deal discretion. Wells Fargo scrapped both its 2050 financed-emissions goal and 2030 sector targets. Morgan Stanley recast its 2030 targets as flexible ranges. Bank of America nixed hard bans on Arctic oil and new coal in favor of “enhanced due diligence.” The collapse of the industry coalitions, like the NZBA, has garnered significant press attention. One by one, banks, including JPMorgan, have left the group. Last month, it announced it was pausing operations.

But to say that the sector has lost interest, or worse, would be to miss the forest for the trees. Debt issued to support sustainable investments continues to increase. Transition finance, where financial firms actively pursue opportunities to fund polluting companies’ emissions reductions, has become a hot area. And, most importantly, clients are still asking questions about climate.

Dimon, for one, argues that what looks like walking away is really just a refocusing. “The things that people are dropping,” he says, “is stuff that just didn’t work—and was virtue signaling.” In a sign of its continued commitment, last year the firm hired Sarah Kapnick, a former chief scientist at the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, to serve as the firm’s global head of climate advisory. She put it succinctly: “My job wouldn’t exist. None of this would exist if there wasn’t clear client demand for it.”

As the gathering in Scottsdale wore on, attendees bounced between discussions on everything from electrification to policy to the trade environment. At a candlelit dinner, they listened to speakers wax on geopolitics. The goal, Petno says, is “to create a crucible for combustion to happen.”

Given this was an event hosted by the world's largest bank, one might expect the most consequential conversations to have centered on mobilizing capital—and there certainly was discussion of that. Attendees explored how venture capital firms could structure larger investments in capital-intensive climate technologies. While such an approach would increase risk, it could ensure companies receive sufficient funding to fully develop their low-carbon solutions. And participants discussed innovative ways to blend philanthropic and profit-oriented funding to unlock previously unfeasible projects.

Nonetheless, the conclusion of many conversations seemed only tangentially related to finance. Stable policy, durable business models, and public-private collaboration will go just as far as new financing tools. “Investors, industry participants, developers, banks, they need good rules,” says Petno. “When the rules swing with every election year, or when you have investor sentiments shift, it’s hard to get on solid footing.”

In some ways, that’s JPMorgan’s climate story too—and the story of finance more broadly. The world needs more financial innovation to tackle climate change, but the sector operates in a much broader societal context; finance is a poor bulwark when policies and markets constantly shift.

This is, in some ways, a tough pill to swallow—particularly for the groups that have put so much stock in the Wall Street fix as a solution to rising emissions. The planet is cooked. Finance can’t save us. But conversations are brewing about new ways to engage the industry. A September report from environmental non-profit RMI calls this moment an “inflection point” for how banks are viewed in climate circles and calls for “right-sizing” the role of banks in the conversation. That includes leaning into banks’ core strengths: structuring deals and advising clients.

The report reminded me of a conversation with JPMorgan’s Rama Variankaval, who oversees the Center for Carbon Transition and serves as the firm’s global head of corporate advisory. “At the end of the day, you have one CEO on the other side of the table that is making the decision. And you can’t simply say, ‘Hey, invest more in climate,’” he says. “He’ll walk out of the door.” Instead, Variankaval says, you need to make the case in terms of how it impacts the balance sheet, credit ratings, or shareholder

engagement. “Only if you’re able to give them a complete picture, and say here are all the domino effects of doing that. Only then is it useful.”

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