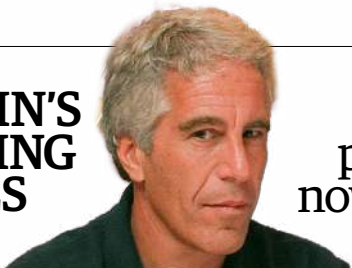


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# THE WEEK

THE BEST OF THE U.S. AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

NOVEMBER 21, 2025  
VOLUME 25 ISSUE 1262



# Hard to swallow

Why so many Democrats think the shutdown deal stinks

p.4



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# Contents



Protesting the detention of a preschool teacher by immigration agents in Chicago (p.5)

## Editor's letter

Any week, you can fill a whole morning with reading about the travesties of immigration enforcement. ICE officers ride around Chicago like third-world paramilitary squads. Immigrants married to U.S. citizens are whisked away to detention centers because of a missing document. Christians are deported to Iran. There are random raids on Home Depot parking lots. Border Patrol agents strut around in masks many miles from any border. Once you start putting the list together, it's hard to know where to end.

And yet: We did not get here suddenly. As cruel and erratic as immigration enforcement has become, what we are seeing is the product of 20 years of failure. Sen. John McCain almost got a bipartisan deal—which would have toughened borders and offered legal status to most undocumented immigrants—in 2007 and it was killed by Republicans. And another in 2013, also killed by Republicans. In 2018, we almost had a compromise on Dreamers, undocumented migrants brought to the U.S. as children, but that too was killed—that time, by Democrats. And then there was the Biden administration, which effectively invited everyone in to apply for asylum, with no plan for what happens to those who are rejected. Having no plan, of course, is a bipartisan problem, and not new: The “temporary protected status” Salvadorans got under George W. Bush in 2001 was extended for more than two decades.

Policy vacuums are filled by opportunists, and in this case by thugs, too. There will be a backlash to the current enforcement regime. But lawmakers who oppose what we are seeing now must come up with a realistic alternative. If we tell migrants to leave, it should be humanely, recognizing that many of them were given false hope. We need a fair policy for people who have been in the U.S. for many years, but not an open invitation to everyone to stay. Masked men in the streets are not an immigration solution, but neither are sanctuary state laws or calls to abolish ICE. Without compromise, we will just see more extreme swings of the political pendulum, each one leaving a wider arc of human suffering.

**Mark Gimein**  
Managing editor

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Jennifer Lawrence (p.10)

# Democrats fume over shutdown deal

## What happened

The Democratic Party was wracked by infighting this week, after eight senators in its caucus struck a deal with Republicans to end the longest government shutdown on record—a deal that failed to secure the party's primary goal. For 40 days, Democrats were united in refusing to reopen the government unless Republicans agreed to extend soon-to-expire enhanced subsidies for the millions of Americans who get health insurance through the Affordable Care Act. But cracks began to emerge among Democrats as shutdown pain mounted, with about 1.4 million federal workers missing paychecks, food aid for some 42 million Americans put on pause, and thousands of flights canceled due to air traffic controllers calling in sick rather than working without pay. The eight caucus moderates said that with Republicans refusing to budge on the ACA subsidies, they had to act. Waiting “would only mean more harm,” said Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.). The resulting spending deal will fund the government through Jan. 30, pay for certain functions including food assistance and veterans' affairs through September, and reverse the Trump administration's attempted shutdown layoffs of some 4,000 federal workers. “Our long national nightmare is finally coming to an end,” said House Speaker Mike Johnson.

Many Democrats reacted with fury to the deal. “We could have won—the premium increase notices were just starting,” said Sen. Chris Murphy (D-Conn.). “Giving in now will embolden” Trump. Reps. Ro Khanna (D-Calif.) and Seth Moulton (D-Mass.) accused Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer, who voted no, of being ineffective and called for his removal. President Trump, who hailed the deal as “very good,” floated a plan to give the enhanced ACA subsidies directly to consumers. “Call it Trumpcare!” he said.

## What the editorials said

“Someone had to step up and be the grown-up in the room,” said *The Boston Globe*. Democrats figured the shutdown would force the GOP to play ball on the ACA extension. But it was clear they weren't going to crack, and the doomed strategy turned stranded air travelers, unpaid federal workers, and people who rely on government services “into collateral damage.” Americans need those health-care subsidies, but they also need a functioning government, and “it was a mistake to pit them against each other.”



Schumer: Facing calls to step down

For putting “the country first,” the defectors are getting the predictable pounding from their party's progressives, said *The Wall Street Journal*. Schumer and friends are playing a “cynical” game, as they appeal to the base with “no” votes while benefiting politically from the shutdown's end. Still, you “almost have to feel for Schumer” and his need to wrangle with his party's “Red Guards”—and his life isn't about to get any easier. The current rage heralds “more bitterness to come heading into 2026.”

## What the columnists said

This was a “cowardly” betrayal, said Will Bunch in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, and an appalling mistake “both morally and politically.” Yes, people were getting hurt, but the Democrats' strategy “was working.” Polls show that about three-quarters of Americans support the ACA subsidies, and Democrats were riding a wave of support and newfound unity after delivering an “election shelacking” to Republicans. But “eight quislings” have given an authoritarian regime “new life,” and taught Trump that Democrats will ultimately wilt under pressure.

This outcome was inevitable, said Josh Barro in *The New York Times*. Shutdowns never yield victories for the party forcing them—especially when that party controls neither Congress nor the presidency—and the progressives who are howling about capitulation right now can “offer no plausible account of how they would have done better, because there isn't one.” While Democrats lost the battle, they've won a larger fight, said Nia-Malika Henderson in *Bloomberg*. “That is the messaging fight over the cost of living, particularly health care.” Last week's blue wave “showed how salient this issue is,” and with enhanced ACA tax credits set to expire next month, Republicans are “on the hook” to address it.

If that doesn't worry Republicans, it should, said Yuval Levin in *National Review*. Health care is “the only significant policy issue” on which the public trusts Democrats more than Republicans. And with average monthly premiums set to more than double next year for the 22 million ACA enrollees who are losing subsidies, Republicans now own the fallout. Democrats may have walked away from the shutdown with little to show, but what did Republicans get? “A few more months of Biden-era spending levels and another health-care debate they have no idea how to win.”

## It wasn't all bad

■ In 2022, Sharon and Andy Longhurst rescued two wild European hedgehogs and helped the sickly animals recuperate at their home in the Scottish Lowlands. Three years later, their garage is now an ICU, with seven incubators and 40 cages, and a maternity ward in the garden. The Longhursts and a team of volunteers have treated some 567 hedgehogs and released 65% of them back into the wild. Sharon says it's a labor of love. “We say we have to draw a line, but then the phone rings and we say, ‘Bring it in.’”

■ More people have walked on the moon than have successfully rowed across the Pacific Ocean. But that didn't deter Jess Rowe, 29, and Miriam Payne, 26. In May, the Britons launched from Peru on a 30-foot vessel heading west, subsisting mainly on chocolate, nuts, biscuits, dried fruit, and seeds for 15-hour sessions.



Rowe and Payne

One week in, they ran into trouble: Their rudder broke. They later fixed their water filter with a pair of underwear. The delays left them racing to reach Australia before the start of the cyclone season. Finally, on Oct. 19, 165 days and 8,000 miles after they started, they landed in Cairns. The history makers want to row across the Indian Ocean next.

■ Fourteen-year-old Persy Arce-ment's pandemic project—an ice-cream-themed board game—has a chance to become a breakout hit. Persy recently won The Toy Association's Young Innovator of the Year award, and she got to showcase her creation at the Chicago Toy & Game Fair before representatives from distributors including Walmart and Amazon. Winning one of them over is the hope, since the Arce-ments invested \$50,000 into six pallets of board games sitting in their garage. “It would be really nice to be parking inside again,” dad Erich said.

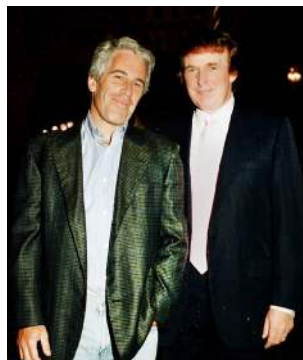
## ...and How They Were Covered

# Trump named in newly released Epstein emails

### What happened

House Democrats this week released emails in which Jeffrey Epstein suggested Trump was more aware of his sex-trafficking crimes than the president has admitted. “Of course he knew about the girls,” Epstein wrote in a 2019 email to journalist Michael Wolff, “as he asked Ghislaine to stop.” In a 2011 email to longtime confidante Ghislaine Maxwell, Epstein wrote that Trump was the “dog that hasn’t barked,” and that although a victim “spent hours at my house with him,” Trump hadn’t “once been mentioned” during an investigation into Epstein. In 2015, Wolff advised Epstein—who died by suicide in 2019—on how to respond if Trump denied flying on Epstein’s plane or visiting his house. “You can hang him in a way that potentially generates a positive benefit for you,” he wrote, or “you could save him, generating a debt.”

Shortly after the Democrats released those key emails, Republicans released 23,000 pages of Epstein-related documents and revealed that the victim whose name was redacted in Maxwell’s email was the late Virginia Giuffre, who, they argued, had never accused Trump of wrongdoing. With Democrats having secured the numbers for a House vote on releasing all the Epstein files, the Trump administration was reportedly attempting to discuss the matter with Republicans who have backed the plan. Meanwhile, a whistleblower this week told House Democrats that Maxwell is seeking a commutation of her 20-year prison sentence, and that she is pampered with custom meals and time to play with puppies in the minimum-security facility in Texas to which she was recently transferred.



Epstein and Trump in 1997

### What the columnists said

There’s “no question” the Democrats timed the email release to coincide with the long-awaited swearing in of Representative-elect Adelita Grijalva, said **Chris Cillizza** in his *Substack* newsletter. The Arizona Democrat gave Democrats the “critical” 218th signature on a discharge petition that will force a House vote on releasing the Epstein files. The vote puts the GOP “in an uncomfortable spot” even if the bill ultimately fails in the Senate. Entering an election year, does anyone “really want to be on the side of keeping the files” under wraps?

Maybe Trump really doesn’t have anything to hide, said the *Houston Chronicle* in an editorial.

But if that’s the case, releasing the files is “the best way for his presidency and the country to move forward.” Instead, he’s trying to keep the lid on, while Maxwell is lounging away at a prison nicknamed “Club Fed” after telling the Justice Department she never witnessed Trump in an inappropriate setting. But given how the White House has handled this saga, it’s worth wondering if Maxwell’s statements are “part of a quid pro quo arrangement.”

Epstein isn’t “going away,” said **Edward Luce** in the *Financial Times*. He’s Trump’s “Achilles’ heel,” and even if Trump’s loyal base and Republican leadership don’t turn on him—and there’s “no law that says MAGA will never turn on its creator”—this story could still cost him a “decisive say over naming his” political heir. And “controlling the succession is his ultimate insurance.”

## Judges order limits on Chicago crackdown

### What happened

President Trump ordered officials to redouble their immigration crackdown in Chicago this week even as federal judges rebuked those agents for using excessive force. Although a court had already barred Trump from sending in the National Guard, the president posted online: “CALL IN THE TROOPS, FAST, BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE!” Last week, Judge Robert Gettleman demanded that Immigration and Customs Enforcement improve “disgusting” conditions at its Broadview facility, saying that making detainees “sleep on a floor next to an overflowed toilet” was “obviously unconstitutional.” And Judge Sara Ellis curtailed the use of tear gas in the city, saying federal agents’ aggressive tactics “shock the conscience” and that Border Patrol chief Gregory Bovino had “admitted he lied” in accusing protesters of violence.

Homeland Security official Tricia McLaughlin credited federal agents for a drop in Chicago crime, although the decline began before the deployment, and she denied reports that agents would soon depart for Charlotte, N.C. She blamed Democrats for fueling an “environment of lawlessness and assault,” citing a migrant who fired shots at agents. Democrats said federal agents were the violent ones. Last week, ICE dragged a teacher out of a Chicago preschool. “We had agents with guns walking around the facility,” said Alderman Matt Martin, “with children inside.” And in the parking lot of a suburban Chicago Sam’s Club, agents fired pepper spray into a car, hitting U.S. citizen Rafael Veraza and his baby. “She was struggling to breathe,” Veraza said.

### What the columnists said

In Chicago, I’ve seen firsthand how Bovino has “dialed the cruelty and spectacle to 11,” said **Gustavo Arellano** in the *Los Angeles Times*, but also how locals have organized and fought back. “Block after block,” people showed up ready with car horns, shouts, and whistles to alert the vulnerable to ICE activity. Even after the court ruling, Bovino was still brandishing tear gas canisters. He has been “openly mocking the federal judge’s injunction prohibiting him from such reckless terrorizing.”

“The U.S. government absolutely must enforce its immigration laws,” said **Jim Geraghty** in *National Review*, yet officers shouldn’t be “stopping people simply based upon their race or their language or accent.” That’s not only immoral; it’s bad politics. Polls indicate we’re already seeing Latinos—a crucial swing demographic—“sour on the Trump administration.” Remember, Texas redistricting was based on the assumption that Latinos would vote Republican. What if they don’t?

These vile tactics aren’t limited to Chicago, said **Harry Litman** in *The New Republic*. “ICE is arresting American citizens” nationwide, at least 170 so far. And numerous lawsuits allege that its agents are running roughshod over the Fourth Amendment, by detaining people without probable cause and with unreasonable force. Fourth Amendment guardrails are what mark “the difference between a democracy and a police state.” We are seeing “the border between law and lawlessness” disappear.

# Controversy of the Week

## Affordability: Does Trump have an answer?

Republicans face a pair of existential threats as they look ahead to next year's midterms, said **Chris Brennan** in *USA Today*. The first is the economy. In exit polls from last week's off-year elections—where Republicans suffered a “thorough thrashing”—voters cited the economy and cost of living as their top concerns. And in a *Washington Post/ABC News* poll taken just before the elections, 71% of Americans said they were spending more on groceries than a year ago, with 59% blaming Trump for rising prices. Republicans' second threat is that Trump “refuses to admit there is a problem.”



Trump: Won't admit to an economic problem

Instead of asking for voters' patience, Trump this week dismissed the affordability crisis as a “con job by Democrats,” insisting that prices are “down,” and that polls showing Americans' economic worries are “fake.” Of all people, Trump should know the folly of this denialism, said the *New York Post* in an editorial. By refusing to acknowledge the economic “struggles of regular Americans,” Trump is “making the same mistake as his archnemesis,” former president Joe Biden, and risks dooming his party to the same electoral fate.

There are signs that Trump recognizes he hasn't “won the affordability battle,” said **Megan Messerly** and **Myah Ward** in *Politico*. In recent days, the White House has “announced a bevy of policies” that, if enacted, “may ease the pressure on household budgets.” They include plans to send Americans \$2,000 tariff “dividend” checks, a reduction in tariffs on coffee, bananas, and other foods, and an investigation into beef producers for price gouging. Trump's exasperation with public sentiment actually has some foundation, said **Matthew Yglesias** in *Slow Boring*. While the price of most products is indeed still rising—annualized inflation was 3% in September, down from a 9.1% peak in 2022—incomes have risen

faster than prices over the past five years, and “it's not actually true that people are less able to afford things than they were in the past.”

But politics is about perception, said **Ben Berkowitz** and **Marc Caputo** in *Axios*, and Trump, on top of everything, has a terrible “optics problem.” When voters, rightly or wrongly, *feel* that they're struggling to make ends meet, it's political insanity for the president to be “jet-setting all over the world,” throwing *Great Gatsby*-themed parties at his Florida estate, and demoing the White

House to build a \$300 million gilded ballroom. Trump's affordability messaging isn't just out of touch, said **Eric Boehm** in *Reason*, it's also “inept.” If, as Trump posted last week, “Our Economy is BOOMING, and Costs are coming way down,” then why do we need relief checks? And what does it say when payments for struggling Americans are funded via the price-raising tariffs we were told would make all of us “wealthier than ever?”

We are in a dangerous moment, said **Jeffrey Blehar** in *National Review*. The affordability crisis has hit young people especially hard, and many believe the American dream—“a spouse, a house, the comforts of modern domesticity”—is now priced beyond reach. That economic discontent caused young voters to swing to Trump last year. But all he has offered them so far are gimmicks, like a 50-year mortgage that will lock them in “long-term debt slavery.” Angry and disillusioned, young Americans are increasingly embracing socialism on the Left and nihilistic nationalism on the Right. If Trump leaves “the younger generation as destitute of future prospects as when he retook office,” their fury will only grow. “Trump is in his final term; perhaps he might not care. You should.”

### Only in America

■ A Washington, D.C., man is suing the National Guard, claiming guardsmen arrested him for playing the *Star Wars* “Imperial March” theme on his phone. Sam O'Hara played the stormtrooper anthem to mock the guards but says his musical protest was legal. “The law might have tolerated government conduct of this sort a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away,” states his complaint. “But in the here and now, the First Amendment bars government officials from shutting down peaceful protests.”

■ A proposed bill in Alabama would bar foreign-born citizens from holding any constitutional office in the state. The bill, from state GOP Sen. Donnie Chesteen, would allow only “natural-born” Americans to serve in the Alabama legislature, or as governor, attorney general, or even local sheriff. Chesteen acknowledged his bill may violate the Constitution, but told reporters that “I think that's for us to take care of on the floor.”

### Good week for:

**Imperial tributes**, after ESPN reported that the White House has lobbied the owners of the Washington Commanders to name the team's new D.C. stadium after President Trump. “That would be a beautiful name,” said White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt, “as it was President Trump who made the rebuilding of the new stadium possible.”

**Misspent youth**, after an 18-year study of more than 3,000 young Norwegians concluded that those who indulged in regular heavy drinking sessions in their late teens and 20s went on to higher levels of education and income than more abstemious contemporaries.

**Empty hats**, after the AI-generated song “Walk My Walk” by Breaking Rust hit No. 1 on *Billboard's* country digital song sales chart. Breaking Rust has more than 2 million monthly listeners on Spotify, despite having “no verifiable human footprint,” as the *San Francisco Chronicle* put it.

### Bad week for:

**Vulnerable seniors**, after President Trump shared a satirical website's report that DOGE has ended annual \$2.5 million payments to former president Barack Obama for “royalties linked to Obamacare.” Trump, 79, shared the screenshot with a one-word comment: “WOW!”

**Big-game hunters**, after police investigating social media reports of an “escaped lion” in County Clare, Ireland, identified the beast as Mouse, a large but “very friendly” Newfoundland dog with a fresh haircut that left a distinctive mane of fur around his head and neck. Police described Mouse as “delighted with his recent viral video clip.”

**Husky masses yearning to breathe free**, after the State Department advised U.S. embassies around the world that they can deny visas to applicants with certain medical conditions, including obesity, that may “require expensive, long-term care” at the expense of U.S. taxpayers.

### In other news

**Rule lets GOP senators sue over phone-records search**  
Senate Republicans this week added a provision to the shutdown-ending spending package that will let senators sue the government if it secretly seizes or subpoenas their data. The language was added at the instruction of Senate Majority Leader John Thune, responding to complaints from eight GOP senators who had their phone records analyzed by the FBI in 2023 as part of special counsel Jack Smith's investigation into the Jan. 6, 2021 U.S. Capitol attack. Retroactive to 2022, the provision will let the eight senators sue for at least \$500,000 for each violation; authorities have up to 60 days to notify a senator if the lawmaker is the target of an investigation. Republicans have accused Smith of tapping their phones; the records Smith obtained included only phone numbers and the time and length of calls. Still, Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) called the subpoenas “disturbing and outrageous political conduct.”

# The U.S. at a Glance

## Utah and Kansas

**Redistricting wars:** A judge in Utah this week struck down a new congressional map proposal put forward by state Republicans in favor of an alternative map that will likely create a Democratic-leaning district in the 2026 midterms. Judge Dianna Gibson ruled that the maps sponsored by the GOP-controlled legislature were designed to cement Republican control of Utah's four House seats and "disfavor



*Overruled by a judge*

Democrats." The map Gibson chose keeps the heavily populated and Democratic Salt Lake County in one district, instead of dividing it among the four congressional seats. The decision was a victory for Democrats as they try to respond to Republicans' mid-decade redistricting efforts across the nation. In Kansas, seven state Republicans blocked plans for a special legislative session and new maps that would have obliterated the state's only Democratic district. Several GOP lawmakers had committee leadership roles revoked as punishment for bucking the party line.

## Hunt, Texas

**Flood victims:** The families of 15 victims who drowned at an all-girls retreat in July sued the camp for gross negligence this week, arguing it prioritized money over safety. As flash flooding battered Central Texas' Hill Country early in the morning of July 4, leaders at Camp Mystic rushed to protect equipment, rather than



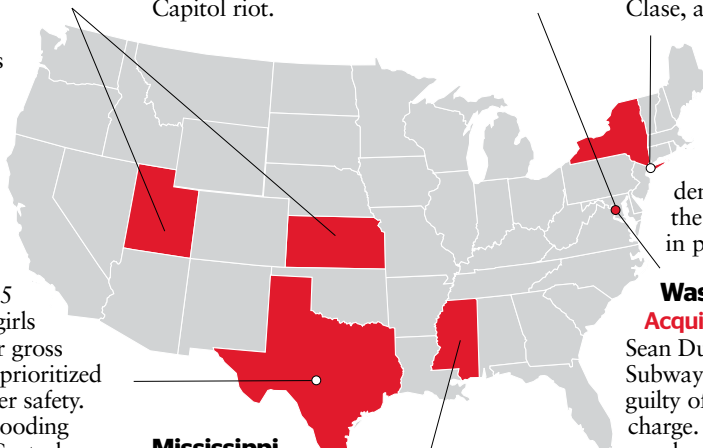
*Avoidable tragedy?*

evacuating campers, the lawsuits allege. The flooding killed 138 people, including 25 girls from Camp Mystic, some as young as 8 years old, and two counselors. The camp's director, 70-year-old Dick Eastland, who reportedly died trying to save some of the girls, is also named as a defendant in the suits. Against the wishes of the victims' families, the Hunt camp plans to reopen next summer using a different campus.

"Camp Mystic is pressing ahead with reopening," said CiCi Williams Steward, whose 8-year-old daughter remains missing, "even if it means inviting girls to swim in the same river that may potentially still hold my daughter's body."

## Washington, D.C.

**Preemptive pardons:** In a largely symbolic move, President Trump this week pardoned a slew of high-profile allies who backed his attempt to overturn the 2020 election. Among the more than 70 people pardoned were former New York City mayor and Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani, who tried to pressure swing state legislators not to certify Joe Biden's election victory; Trump's former chief of staff, Mark Meadows; and lawyers John Eastman and Kenneth Chesebro. Trump also pardoned longtime aide Boris Epshteyn and attorney Sidney Powell. None faced federal charges, although former special counsel Jack Smith identified Giuliani, Eastman, and Powell as co-conspirators in his probe into the 2020 election. Written in broad language, the pardons will prevent future administrations from pursuing criminal charges against these allies. In January, Trump pardoned more than 1,500 people changed in connection with Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol riot.



## Mississippi

**Voting laws:** The Supreme Court this week agreed to hear a challenge to Mississippi's mail-in voting laws, in a case that could lead to tighter rules around the country. The lawsuit underscores the GOP's broader war over the use of voting by mail, which President Trump has blamed without evidence for his 2020 election loss. The Republican plaintiffs in the case, *Watson v. Republican National Committee*, are asking the justices to reconsider Mississippi's policy of accepting mail-in ballots up to five days after Election Day, so long as they are postmarked on or before the day voters head to the polls; similar policies have led to litigation in several states. The challengers initially filed the lawsuit against Mississippi Secretary of State Michael Watson in 2024, arguing Congress mandated that voting take place only on a single day and that allowing late-arriving ballots to be counted undermines election integrity and public trust.

## New York City

**Pitch fixing:** Two Major League Baseball players this week faced charges of aiding sports bettors in the latest scandal to hit professional sports since the Supreme Court legalized sports gambling in 2018. In a federal indictment unsealed in New York, prosecutors charged Cleveland Guardians pitchers Luis Ortiz, 26, and Emmanuel Clase, 27, with wire fraud and multiple counts



*Ortiz and Clase*

of conspiracy for giving gamblers inside information about pitches they would throw. The gamblers used that knowledge to win over \$450,000. In exchange for \$12,000, Ortiz allegedly agreed to throw balls on two pitches in two games in June. Clase, a three-time All-Star, arranged the transaction and stands accused of pitch fixing dating back to 2023. "Tell him that this is payment for a horse," Clase reportedly instructed Ortiz on how to hide his kickbacks. Both deny any wrongdoing. If convicted, the players each face up to 65 years in prison.

## Washington, D.C.

**Acquitted:** A jury last week found Sean Dunn, a D.C. resident who hurled a Subway sandwich at a federal officer, not guilty of a federal misdemeanor assault charge. Dunn, a former Justice Department paralegal, had been walking along U Street in August when, in a fit of pique, he threw a foot-long hoagie at a group of Border Patrol agents standing nearby. Border Patrol officer Greg Lairmore testified that the sandwich "exploded all over" his chest and claimed he could smell mustard and onions. The officers chased and detained Dunn, and federal prosecutors tried to charge him with felony assault on law enforcement. A grand jury, however, rejected the more serious charges leveled at Dunn, known online as "sandwich guy." His acquittal highlights the difficulties federal authorities have had at securing indictments and jury convictions during the President Trump-ordered crackdown in the city.



*Dunn*

# The World at a Glance



All doomed

## Edgewood, British Columbia

**Scandal over ostrich cull:** The slaying of an ostrich farm's entire flock last week has outraged farmers in Canada and the U.S. Canadian food inspectorate marksmen shot dead all 330 ostriches, some of them decades old, on the small family farm after bird flu killed several dozen birds there last year. The owner had fought the cull order, saying the farm had switched from meat

production to scientific research during the pandemic, and that eggs from birds that had survived the flu might carry the secret of a cure for H5N1. U.S. officials, including Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., called for the birds to be spared, and supporters of the farmers created a protest tent camp on the property. But Canada's Supreme Court refused to hear the appeal. Katie Pasitney, whose family owns the business, said, "They brought war to a peaceful, loving farm."

## London

**Editing Trump:** The BBC's top two executives, director-general Tim Davie and news chief Deborah Turness, resigned this week over a misleading edit of the rally speech President Trump made before the Jan. 6 U.S. Capitol riot. An episode of the BBC's *Panorama* documentary series spliced together two sentences from different parts of the hourlong speech, cutting Trump's call for peaceful protest so that he appears to say, "We're going to walk down to the Capitol and I'll be there with you. And we fight. We fight like hell." Trump called the edits "malicious" and "disparaging" and threatened to sue the national broadcaster for \$1 billion unless it retracts the documentary, formally apologizes, and offers payments to "appropriately compensate" him. BBC chairman Samir Shah apologized for the "error of judgment."

## Berlin

**Persecuted:** German far-right activist Naomi Seibt, 25, has asked the U.S. for political asylum, saying Germany is persecuting her for her views. Seibt, a social media influencer who backs the Alternative for Germany (AfD), says she's been spied on by German intelligence and was refused state protection despite "death threats from antifa." She is currently in the U.S. and has filed paperwork to try to stay. Asylum is usually reserved for people fleeing war or repression, not Western democracies. But Germany's far right has established strong ties with prominent MAGA figures—Seibt took credit for arranging a live chat between Elon Musk and AfD leader Alice Weidel—and the Trump administration has prioritized admission of white refugees such as South Africa's Afrikaners.



USS Gerald R. Ford

said the world's biggest aircraft carrier, the USS *Gerald R. Ford*, had reached the region, further beefing up the largest display of U.S. might in the Caribbean since the 1989 Panama invasion. U.S. air strikes destroyed two more alleged drug boats, bringing the total number of people killed in such strikes to over 75, and the U.K. said it would stop sharing drug intelligence with the U.S. Colombian President Gustavo Petro urged Venezuela to join a federation to resurrect Gran Colombia, a 19th-century country that spanned much of northern South America. Petro said the only way to answer Trump's aggression is "our own union."

## Caracas

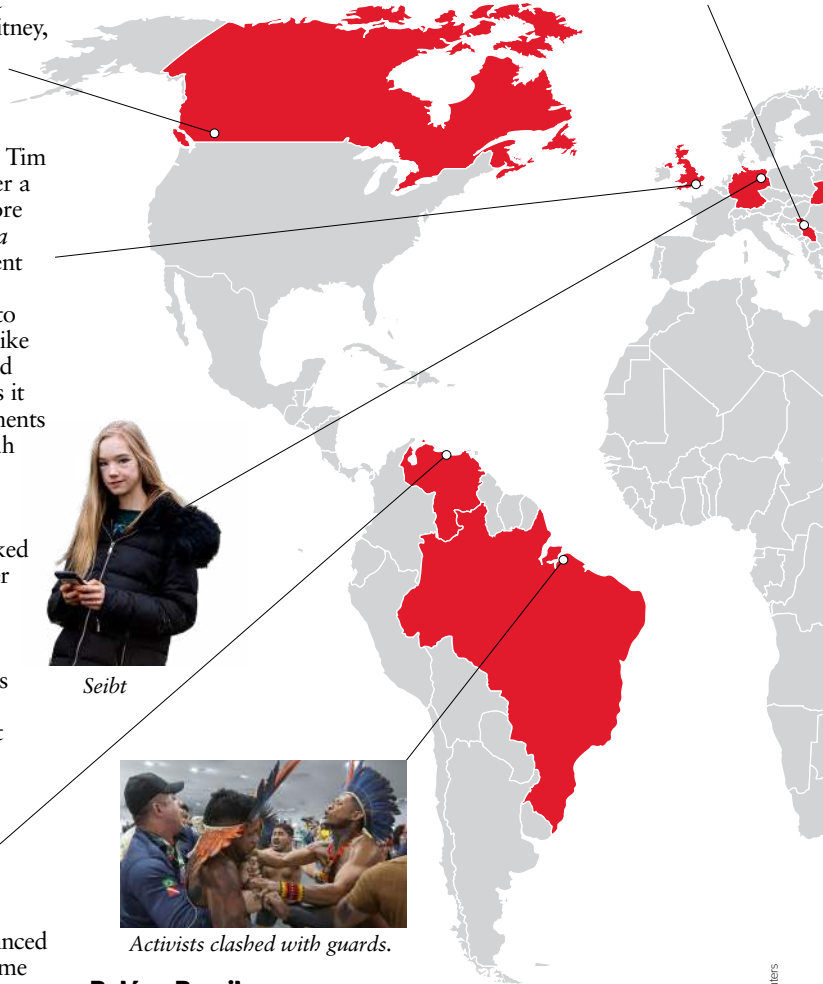
**War footing:** Venezuela announced a "massive deployment" of some 200,000 soldiers this week, putting its entire military arsenal at "full operational readiness" to counter a U.S. naval buildup. The U.S.

## Belgrade, Serbia

**Sweet deal for Kushner:** Thousands of Serbs gathered outside the former headquarters of the Yugoslav military this week to protest the fast-track approval of Jared Kushner's project to convert the site into luxury shops and apartments. Protesters said the move was an attempt by President Aleksandar Vucic to curry favor with Kushner's father-in-law, President Trump. The property, damaged by U.S.-led NATO bombing in 1999, was a protected heritage site until the government signed a deal with Kushner's company Affinity Global Development last year. Vucic said it was time to "overcome the burden from 1999" and forge better U.S. relations.



The site symbolized resistance.



Seibt



Activists clashed with guards.

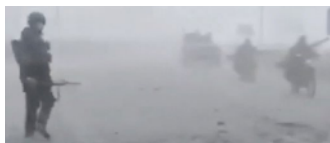
## Belém, Brazil

**Indigenous protest:** Dozens of Indigenous activists forced their way into the U.N. climate summit this week to demand protection of their forests. The summit, known as COP30, is being held in Brazil's Amazon rainforest. "We want our lands free from agribusiness, oil exploration, illegal miners, and illegal loggers," said Gilmar, an Indigenous leader who goes by one name. Brazil had said it would focus the summit on preventing deforestation, which most countries support, rather than disputed topics like a carbon tax. Even so, the U.S. stayed away for the first time in the event's 30-year history. While the 2015 Paris agreement committed countries to cutting emissions in an effort to keep warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius over preindustrial levels, the world is now on track to exceed 2.8 degrees C of warming by 2100.

# The World at a Glance

## Pokrovsk, Ukraine

**Mad Max siege:** Russia released video this week showing its soldiers motorcycling through dense fog to enter the Ukrainian city of Pokrovsk, like a scene from *Mad Max*. Russia has deployed 150,000 troops in its yearlong push to take the ruined city, whose road and rail junctions are crucial for seizing the Donetsk region. It is trying to surround the city to cut supply lines. Ukraine said the fog had made it hard for drones to target incoming troops and that only 300 Russians had entered Pokrovsk so far. But President Volodymyr Zelensky's wartime government was also shaken on another front, when his former business partner and his justice minister were implicated in a \$100 million corruption scandal involving kickbacks from nuclear energy contractors.



*Soldiers on motorbikes*

## Damascus

**Welcoming sanctions relief:** Syria celebrated the U.S.'s decision to partially lift sanctions this week, after President Trump met with Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa in the White House. "He comes from a very tough place, and he's a tough guy. I like him," Trump said. The welcome sealed a remarkable turnaround for al-Sharaa, who was once a member of al Qaida and had a \$10 million U.S. bounty on his head. Last year, al-Sharaa led a rebel coalition to topple the Bashar al-Assad regime, and just last week the U.S. removed him from its terrorist list. Heralding what he called a "new era" of cooperation with the U.S., al-Sharaa said his country would join the U.S.-led coalition fighting ISIS. The U.S. has now suspended sanctions on energy and most foreign investment in Syria but left in place bans on Russian and Iranian investment.



*Former enemies*

## Manila

**One-two punch:** Super Typhoon Fung-wong pounded the Philippines this week with winds of 115 miles per hour, causing floods and landslides and forcing 1.4 million people to flee their homes. The winds howled "like it was the end of the world," said Ivy Villamor, a resident of the coastal village of Sinbanali. The storm, which killed a dozen people, came just days after Typhoon Kalmaegi swept through and left more than 200 dead. Fung-wong made landfall 120 miles from Manila in northern Luzon, home to half of the country's 117 million inhabitants. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. declared a state of emergency to speed aid distribution to victims of both storms. The Philippines gets about 20 major storms every year, as well as frequent earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, making the archipelago one of the world's most disaster-prone countries.



*Floods upon floods*

## Bangkok

**Truce called off:** Thailand canceled a Trump-brokered ceasefire with Cambodia this week after a Thai soldier lost a leg in a land mine explosion in a disputed border area. The two sides formalized the Kuala Lumpur Accord to stop the fighting during President Trump's trip to Asia last month. "This incident has made us realize that a de-escalation didn't happen as expected, despite the efforts we made," said Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul. Cambodia said it was "gravely concerned" about Thailand's decision. It said the land mine hadn't been planted in the current dispute—which is over control of a 1,000-year-old temple prized by both countries—but probably dated to the civil war in the 1970s.

## Islamabad

**Attacks in capitals:** A suicide bomber blew himself up next to a police car at the gate of a courthouse in Islamabad this week, killing a dozen people and wounding nearly 30. It was the first strike against civilians in Pakistan's capital in a decade, and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif accused "Indian terrorist proxies," saying the blast was "backed by India" from Afghan soil. Both India and Afghanistan denied involvement. A day earlier in the Indian capital of New Delhi, a car blew up near the historic Red Fort, killing 13 people. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi vowed to capture "all those responsible" for what his government called a "terrorist incident," but he did not immediately blame Pakistan.



*Destruction in Pakistan*

## Kiryat Gat, Israel

**U.S. aid takeover:** The U.S. replaced Israel in managing humanitarian aid to Gaza last week as part of an effort to implement President Trump's peace plan, which calls for a surge in supplies to Palestinian civilians.



*Aid trucks roll in at last.*

The Civil-Military Coordination Center, an agency in southern Israel led by the U.S. military, will take the lead in getting food and medicine to starving civilians in the bombed-out Palestinian enclave, although a U.S. official said the Israelis are still "part of the conversation." Israel's military had restricted aid for months, saying Hamas had been looting the food trucks. Aid workers said not nearly enough food had been getting through. Israel has been "blocking the Trump plan's humanitarian clauses," said Jan Egeland, secretary general of the Norwegian Refugee Council. "For us, to have the U.S. actively engaged is very good news."

### How Hopkins found his path



Growing up in Wales, Anthony Hopkins didn't seem like a star in waiting, said Steve Rose in *The Guardian* (U.K.). The only son of a family of bakers, he was useless in school; Hopkins says one teacher called him "a brainless carthorse." He was often bullied and had few friends. "I couldn't understand anything intellectually or academically, and that drove me into a kind of loneliness

and resentment." But Hopkins found he had "one small gift," and it changed his life: "I could remember things." When he saw Laurence Olivier in 1948's *Hamlet*, hearing Shakespeare hit him like "a punch in my head," and he began memorizing speeches from *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar*. It steered him toward acting, and his knack for memorizing entire scripts remains a secret weapon. "That was my gift, really: to know the part so well that I had no fear. Once you know the script, you have a relaxation, so you can hear the other person." Now 87, he recently began to wonder if he has Asperger's or another form of autism, citing a "lack of emotionality" and other factors beside his uncanny memory. "My wife, Stella, she diagnosed me. She said, 'Well, you're obsessive. Everything has to be laid out perfectly.' So that's a little twist in the brain, I suppose. But I'm quite happy with whatever inner disturbance I have."

### Rushdie's septuagenarian blessings

Salman Rushdie is feeling pretty good about life these days, said Johanna Thomas-Corr in *The Times* (U.K.). On the most basic level, he's just glad to be breathing, after being almost stabbed to death in 2022 by a man who accused *The Satanic Verses* author of attacking Islam. "There was a moment when I had no pulse," Rushdie says. "That's how close it was. Once you've gone through that, it just gives you a sense of the value of every day." Beyond that, he's finding that after four previous marriages, his fifth—to poet and novelist Rachel Eliza Griffiths, 46—is the charm. "This is definitely it. Many people in my family, when Eliza and I got together, said, 'Finally.' In the end, she had a T-shirt made for me saying 'Finally.'" At 78, he finds he's more relaxed and more tolerant of others—including editors. "When I was younger, I was more of an idiot about it. I would say, 'Well, whose book is this? Whose name's on the cover?' Now I feel I'd use all the help I can get!" Still, he seems full of life despite his knife-attack injuries, which include a damaged liver and the loss of his right eye. "But I think of that funny line Saul Bellow wrote about how, after 80, the big things kick in. I have about a year and a half."



### Lawrence's postpartum struggle

Jennifer Lawrence has long struggled with anxiety, said Lulu Garcia-Navarro in *The New York Times*. But after her second child was born early this year, she went through something else entirely. "I felt like a tiger was chasing me every day," says the actress, 35. "I had nonstop intrusive thoughts that I was at the whim of. They controlled me." What was she fretting about? "It was fear about my child, just picturing every worst-case scenario, and then doubting everything that I was doing," she said. "I thought he cried because he didn't like his life, or me. I thought I was doing everything wrong, and that I would ruin my children." Even now, having pulled back from the abyss, "I live in guilt. Is this the right breakfast? Is this what we should be talking about on the way home from school? I'm always worried that I'm failing them." Lawrence says she's learned how to stop that spiral. "I know I'm a good mom and my kids are happy and I have a great husband, so I can do a reality check and be like, 'Everybody's OK, you're just spinning.'" She's gotten another assist as well. "I got on a drug called Zurzuvae, and I took it for two weeks and it really helped. So if anybody's having postpartum: Zurzuvae. I'm not paid by them, but they could maybe throw me something."

### In the news

■ **Jeremy Renner** last week sent a cease and desist letter to a Chinese filmmaker who accused *The Hurt Locker* actor of sending her "unsolicited pornographic images" and making deportation threats. **Yi Zhou**, 38, claims Renner sent her the images "out of the blue" this summer, after which the pair began a romantic and working relationship, with Renner agreeing to collaborate on her documentary, *Chronicles of Disney*. But the pair's relationship soon soured, Zhou said, with Renner committing "domestic aggressions" and then threatening "to call immigration/ICE on me." An attorney for Renner, 54, called the allegations "false, outrageous, and highly defamatory," saying the pair met only once in July. After a "brief consensual



encounter," the attorney said, Renner "rejected her romantic advances," leading Zhou to harass the actor via text and threaten to "harm him publicly" if he didn't agree to promote her documentary and appear to be her boyfriend.

■ **Kim Kardashian** revealed last week that she did not pass the California bar exam, along with about 45% of aspiring attorneys who took the notoriously tough test this summer. "Well...I'm not a lawyer yet, I just play a very well-dressed one on TV," Kardashian, 45, wrote on social media, referencing her current role as a divorce lawyer in the Hulu series *All's Fair*. The underwear mogul, who began pursuing a legal career in 2018, vowed to try again. "No giving up—just more studying and even more determination." Though it's unclear how Kardashian studied for the bar, she disclosed in a *Vanity Fair* interview

last week that she used ChatGPT for "legal advice," adding that the AI chatbot is "always wrong. It has made me fail tests."

■ **Kanye West** made a groveling apology to a New York City rabbi last week, blaming his streak of antisemitic remarks—as well as his release of a Hitler-praising song and Nazi-themed merch—on mental illness. The rapper, 48, told Rabbi Yoshiyahu Yosef Pinto, a kabbalist whose famous devotees include Los Angeles Lakers star LeBron James, that he felt "profound remorse" for his actions, which occurred as he was struggling with "various issues of bipolar." Pinto told West that "a person is not defined by his mistakes but by the way he chooses to correct them." This isn't the first time West has claimed to have been cured of antisemitism. In 2023, he said actor Jonah Hill's performance in the comedy *21 Jump Street* had made him "like Jewish people again."

# Briefing

## The ‘Kavanaugh stop’

Activists say a Supreme Court ruling has given federal agents a green light to racially profile Latinos.

### What is a ‘Kavanaugh stop’?

The name derives from a September ruling by the Supreme Court, which by a 6-3 vote lifted a lower-court order barring immigration agents in Los Angeles from stopping people based solely on several factors, including race. The original case was brought by plaintiffs who argued agents conducting immigration sweeps targeted L.A. residents just for being working-class Latinos. Such profiling has been barred since 1975, when the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that California border agents who stopped a car because its occupants looked Mexican violated the Constitution’s protections against unreasonable searches and seizures. In the L.A. case, a federal judge ruled that agents needed more than a combination of a person’s race or ethnicity, the fact that they spoke Spanish or accented English, the type of work they do, and where they were found to justify detaining someone. The Supreme Court’s conservative majority reversed the ruling—opening the door, liberal Justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote in a dissent, to “a country where the government can seize anyone who looks Latino, speaks Spanish, and appears to work a low-wage job.” The majority issued no explanation for its decision, but Justice Brett Kavanaugh laid out his reasoning in a concurring opinion.

### What did Kavanaugh say?

He said it was constitutionally permissible—and indeed “common sense”—to target people due to “apparent ethnicity” combined with other factors, such as speaking Spanish or being at a car wash or bus stop. Being stopped on such grounds is a minor inconvenience, wrote Kavanaugh; any questioning is “typically brief” and U.S. citizens and legal residents will “promptly go free.” Immigration lawyers and rights groups reacted with alarm to the ruling. The court “greenlit racial profiling,” said Jennifer Bade, an immigration attorney in Boston. “This effectively makes us a ‘show your papers’ nation where appearance and language is going to make everyone a suspect.”

### Has racial profiling increased?

Residents of Chicago and other areas where the Trump administration has launched an immigration crackdown say roving patrols of federal agents are increasingly stopping anyone who looks Latino and demanding ID. In numerous cases, U.S. citizens have been handcuffed, questioned, and held for hours or even days before agents confirmed their status. “We have never seen this type of enforcement on the streets ever,” said Mark Fleming, an attorney at the National Immigrant Justice Center. Maria Greeley, 44, a Chicago restaurant worker, said she was zip-tied by three federal agents on her way home from work. She showed her passport but was questioned for an hour by the agents, who insisted she didn’t “look like” a Greeley and called her a liar. It was “terrifying,” she said. “I am Latina and I am a service worker. I fit the description of what they’re looking for now.”



U.S. citizen Garcia Venegas detained

### How many citizens have been detained?

There’s no official number, but news organization ProPublica has documented more than 170 cases this year where federal agents held citizens against their will. Some were tackled, beaten, and tased; about two dozen said they were held for more than a day with no chance to call a lawyer or family member. At least three were pregnant, and nearly 20 were children. In many cases, administration officials claimed the detainee had assaulted or impeded agents, but charges were often not filed or cases were dismissed. It happened to Javier Ramirez, 32, an auto shop owner in Montebello, Calif. He says agents entered his business, wrestled him to the ground, held him at gunpoint, and took him to a detention center where he spent five days before being released. Homeland Security said he assaulted officers; security footage shows no assault and charges against him were later dropped.

### How are Latino communities responding?

Raids are creating a “culture of fear” that’s causing even citizens to stay home for fear of being detained, said Mario Trujillo, a councilman in Downey, Calif., a heavily Latino L.A. suburb. Many citizens in targeted areas now carry passports everywhere they go, including members of other minorities. “Now the onus is on anyone who’s not white, male, and MAGA to prove they belong in this country,” said Paul Liu, a Chinese American in Fresno, Calif. Homeland Security spokeswoman Tricia McLaughlin insists that ICE operations are “highly targeted” and calls allegations of racial profiling “categorically false.” But top Border Patrol commander Gregory Bovino has admitted his agents consider appearance when arresting someone. One factor, he told a white reporter, is “How do they look compared to, say, you?”

### Do citizens have recourse against such arrests?

The question of whether agents can legally use race as the basis for a stop isn’t fully settled. The Supreme Court ruling was issued through its emergency “shadow docket,” and lawsuits from plaintiffs who claim their civil rights were violated by racial profiling are working their way through the judicial system and could eventually be heard by the high court. One suit was filed by Leo Garcia Venegas, 26, a U.S.-born citizen who was detained twice by federal agents while working at construction sites in Alabama; in one instance, he was wrestled to the ground, told his REAL ID was fake, and held for over an hour before being released. He said the agents did not question any white or Black workers. It’s possible such a case may produce a different outcome at the Supreme Court, but given the earlier ruling and the deference the conservative majority has shown to the administration, it’s not considered likely. In the meantime, the indiscriminate stops are having what activists believe is the desired effect: spreading fear. “I cannot work in peace anymore,” said Garcia Venegas. “I am always nervous.”

### Turning to facial scans

Federal agents attempting to identify undocumented migrants are deploying a new tool: facial recognition technology. Numerous bystander videos show agents approaching people on the street, asking for ID, then taking a smartphone snap of the person’s face, which is seemingly fed into a database. ICE and Border Patrol are known to use Mobile Fortify, a Department of Homeland Security app connected to a database of over 200 million images. The use of the technology has been greeted with alarm by civil liberties advocates. It’s “frightening, repugnant, and unconstitutional,” said Rep. Bennie Thompson, the ranking Democrat on the House Homeland Security Committee, who said ICE officials have told the committee that agents may ignore evidence of citizenship if Mobile Fortify marks someone as an undocumented migrant. The use of the app in random stops, said Matthew Guariglia of the nonprofit Electronic Frontier Foundation, means that “any remaining pretense” that immigration agents are targeting people in “any kind of ‘precise’ way should be left in the dust.”

# Best Columns: The U.S.

## Why I had to resign as a judge

Mark L. Wolf  
*The Atlantic*

Forty years after President Ronald Reagan appointed me as a federal judge, I'm resigning from the bench, said Mark L. Wolf. President Trump's relentless "assault on the rule of law" is "so deeply disturbing to me" that I can no longer adhere to judicial restraints on public comments. Trump is perverting justice, prosecuting political adversaries like Letitia James and James Comey on flimsy charges, while pardoning violent Jan. 6 rioters and protecting allies like border czar Tom Homan, who allegedly took \$50,000 in a cash bribe in an FBI sting. Trump has fired 18 inspectors general responsible for detecting fraud in federal agencies, eliminated the FBI's public-corruption squad, and removed guardrails placed on the sleazy cryptocurrency industry after launching his own \$TRUMP coin. Recklessly, this president has frequently denounced and even defied federal judges who have attempted to block his constitutionally questionable executive orders, sparking "an unprecedented number of serious threats" against them. As he bulldozes limits on his power, Trump has "dismantled much of what I dedicated my life to," and I will now join those openly fighting this "existential threat to democracy and the rule of law."

## Usha Vance signed up for this

Renée Graham  
*The Boston Globe*

Vice President JD Vance might have disrespected his wife's Hindu faith to please conservative Christians, said Renée Graham, but don't fall for the "poor, poor Usha routine." Usha knows she married a "political opportunist and shape-shifter" who hopes to inherit the MAGA movement, and she's going along for the ride. People felt sorry for Usha after her husband, a Catholic convert, recently told a cheering crowd at a Turning Point USA event that he hoped that his wife would convert to Christianity. When Vance combined that affront with an "uncomfortably intimate hug" with Charlie Kirk's widow, Erika, the internet exploded with "You in danger, girl" memes. Usha, however, is no helpless dummy: She's a Yale-trained lawyer who clerked for Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts. As the daughter of Indian immigrants, she has stood by her man through his "disgusting lies" about Haitians eating dogs and cats, and his nativist insistence that only those born in the U.S. are real Americans. Perhaps she views her "adjacency to whiteness and power" as protection for herself and her biracial children. But as the administration wages war on people of color and constitutional rights, "it's America—not Usha Vance—that's in danger."

## Cheney paved the way for Trump

Andrew Sullivan  
*Substack*

"Dick Cheney pioneered the Trump presidency," said Andrew Sullivan. Cheney's relentless efforts to turn the presidency into an all-powerful "unitary executive" have largely been lost amid the tributes to the Machiavellian former vice president last week. Yes, Cheney broke with Donald Trump after Jan. 6, but while playing a dominant role in the George W. Bush White House, he insisted that the commander in chief "could militarily attack anyone, anywhere, at any time, for any reason." After the Bush administration ignored CIA warnings before 9/11 that al Qaida was plotting a major terrorist attack, a frantic Cheney helped engineer the false claim that Saddam Hussein was making "weapons of mass destruction" to justify a "pre-emptive" war on Iraq. Cheney always insisted he had "no regrets" about that war, despite the hundreds of thousands of civilian casualties, its \$2 trillion cost, and the chaos it left. He also never apologized for promoting a lawless, immoral, and un-American torture regime of terrorist suspects, including nearly drowning them, suspending them naked from shackles, keeping them awake for days, and literally driving some of them mad. "King Donald is the logical end point of Cheney's entire political career."

### Viewpoint

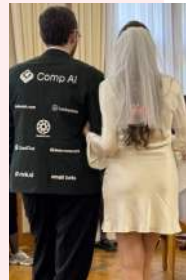
"Donald Trump himself may not be an antisemite, even as he harbors some antisemitic notions (e.g., Jews are money-grubbing) and regularly repeats some antisemitic tropes (e.g., Jews hold dual loyalties). But he has been a prime force fostering a political climate in which all forms of hatred—very much including antisemitism—flourish. He's been a facilitator of vicious antisemites via his associations and appointments, and remains on good terms with the openly antisemitic Tucker Carlson. Trump commands a vast audience. If there has been a normalization of antisemitism in America, it comes in no small part from the very top."

*Gabriel Schoenfeld in The Bulwark*

### It must be true... I read it in the tabloids

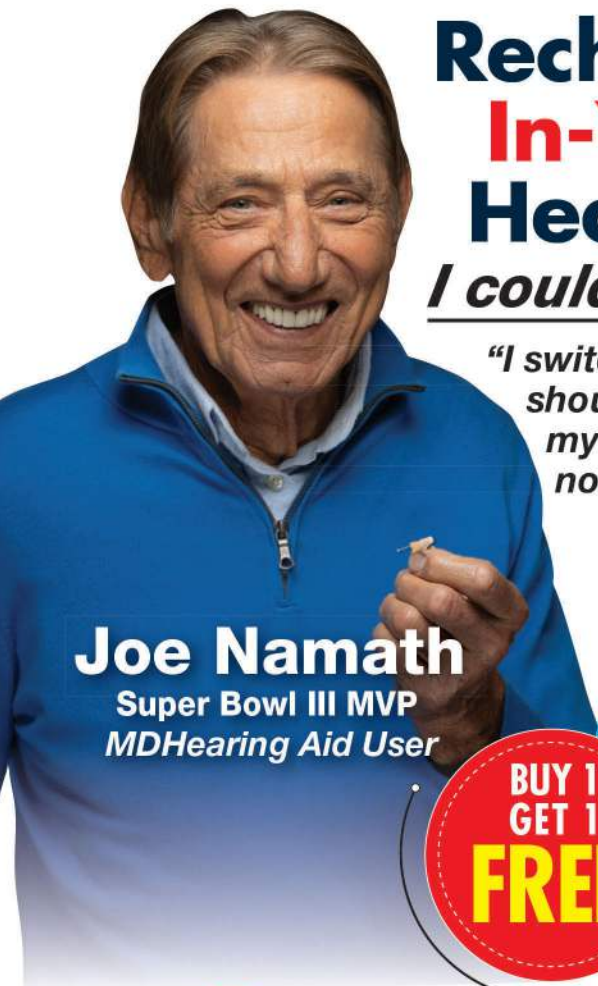
■ A German museum is offering tours with a "grumpy guide" who berates and insults the public. Inspired in part by the success of "rude waiter" restaurants, the 70-minute tours at the Kunstpalast museum in Düsseldorf feature a combative performance artist, Carl Brandi. He snaps at tourgoers for checking their phones, points fingers in their faces, and berates them for the stupidity of their questions. "I try to make them feel as ignorant as possible," said Brandi, who also mocks the museum itself. "I thought it was very funny and clever," said one tourgoer, Lothar Richter, 68. The tours are sold out through next year.

■ An unemployed French salesman financed his wedding by selling ad space on his tuxedo. Eager to marry his fiancée but "completely broke," Dagobert



Renouf put out a social media post seeking sponsors. To his surprise, 26 tech startups bought placements ranging from \$300 to \$2,000 depending on visibility, totaling about \$10,000. Renouf had to pay taxes on the ad revenue and spent \$5,200 on a custom, ad-spangled suit. But he did make enough to marry his sweetheart—and his initiative impressed a New York-based startup that offered him a position. "I found my dream job thanks to this," he said.

■ A Florida man was arrested and charged with DUI while returning from a Halloween party dressed as a prison inmate. Jimmie Glover, 18, was wearing bright orange jumpsuit pants and a white tank top when he was pulled over in Port St. Lucie around 6 a.m. and allegedly failed a sobriety test. He was taken into custody until he posted bond. Glover "was already dressed for arrest!" the department quipped on Facebook.



**Joe Namath**  
Super Bowl III MVP  
MDHearing Aid User

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## NIGERIA

## Now we have to worry about a U.S. invasion

Editorial  
*Punch*

It's always "a bad omen" when Donald Trump takes an interest in you, said *Punch* in an editorial. Having watched a Fox News report on a massacre of Nigerian Christians, the U.S. president is now threatening to invade our country to kill terrorists. It's true that since the 2014 abduction of 276 Chibok schoolgirls, tens of thousands of Nigerians have been killed and more than 1,700 children have been kidnapped. It's also true that the perpetrators are mostly Muslim, members of Boko Haram or an ISIS affiliate. But the victims include Muslims and Christians alike. We've also seen deadly clashes between herders and farmers that are motivated

by territory, not religion. Our leaders have failed to stem this violence, and that is indeed a crisis. But it's not one that can be solved by U.S. air strikes. Whenever the U.S. goes in "guns a-blazing," as Trump has suggested it do, it leaves chaos and extremism in its wake. Look at Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya—all are worse off after American intervention. If the U.S. "sincerely wants to help," it can do so "by providing modern arms and deploying its vast capacity in surveillance and intelligence to help pinpoint insurgents so that Nigerian troops can destroy them." Bombing this country will only condemn us to a "quagmire of endless instability."

## JAMAICA

## Melissa nearly wiped us off the map

Priesnell Warren  
*Jamaica Observer*

The "economic obliteration" Hurricane Melissa wrought across Jamaica was staggering, said Priesnell Warren. Winds gusting to more than 200 miles per hour ripped roofs off 120,000 homes and other buildings, and floodwaters swept away roads. Dozens of people were killed, and at least 25 communities are still cut off by landslides. The damage was estimated at \$7 billion, nearly a third of our gross domestic product. This will "set our development clock back by years, if not decades." And yet, it could have been even worse. Kingston, the capital and home to nearly a million of our 2.8 million citizens and Jamaica's "economic heart," escaped a direct hit. "Had Melissa's eyewall

made landfall there"—rather than 95 miles to the west—"Jamaica as a functioning state would have ceased to exist." This horrifying fact should be a "cataclysmic wake-up call." The future threats we once feared from climate change are "now our painful present." Wet seasons are now flood seasons, while dry spells bring prolonged drought. A "vicious cycle of financial strain, food insecurity, and public health vulnerability" is the new normal. Jamaica needs to act now to beef up building codes and bury power lines, and to decentralize the economy so that losing one city won't bring us to our knees. "The storm has passed," but our survival hinges on how well we prepare for the next one.

## Mexico: If a man can grab the president, no woman is safe

"Is nobody protecting the president?" asked Juan Manuel Asai in *La Crónica de Hoy*. Claudia Sheinbaum, Mexico's first woman president, was greeting the public near the National Palace last week when a man sidled up behind her, put his arms around her shoulders, and pawed at her breasts. The groper, who smelled of alcohol, got his face close to her neck, nearly kissing her before she jerked away and an aide got between her and the attacker. Inexplicably, her security team didn't detain the suspect, Uriel Rivera Martínez, 33. He was only arrested hours later after he allegedly accosted another woman. In major countries, like China and the U.S., leaders are surrounded by highly trained bodyguards who can spot and neutralize "dangerous individuals" in a crowd. Mexico, overrun with drug cartels, is "more dangerous" than those places, and our president deserves "similar, or even better, protection." Why doesn't she have it?



And then they just let him go.

It's shocking that Sheinbaum's aides "didn't take the incident more seriously," said Ricardo Raphael in *Milenio*. The assailant put his face "within millimeters of her jugular vein," yet her security team simply let him leave. This is unconscionable at a time when Mexico's "sovereignty is under threat" not just by drug lords but by Donald Trump, who wants to invade our land to battle the cartels. The assassination of the Mexican president would be a perfect excuse for Trump to send in the troops. There's something fishy here, said Macario Schettino in *El Financiero*. Maybe this attack really was just a mind-boggling security lapse. But the video went viral so quickly, I can't be

the only one who suspects a "publicity stunt." Perhaps her team thought that being attacked would "generate immediate sympathy." Or it may have been trying to show that the government wasn't to blame for the recent wave of cartel assassinations of politicians, because "anyone in Mexico can be exposed to aggression."

That's typical—blame the victim instead of the pig who assaulted her, said *La Cadera de Eva* in an editorial. "Silence, disbelief, and normalization are all part of the violence" that women are routinely subjected to in Mexico. We face sexual and physical abuse daily, "without cameras" or the institutional support the president is afforded. Mexico has an epidemic of femicide, with more than 3,000 women killed every year, but 95% of the cases go unprosecuted. In 2025 so far, nearly 10,000 women have reported sexual harassment or assault, and many others were assaulted but didn't report it. In surveys, almost half of Mexican women say they have experienced sexual violence in public spaces. That's because "we are a nation of machismo," said Julio Broca in *e-Consulta*. Mexican men "see women as objects," not least because female characters in TV and film are depicted as playthings. Even women who make it to the boardroom or the statehouse are assumed to be controlled by male colleagues, just as Sheinbaum is often accused of being the puppet of her predecessor Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Mexico "will never be a world power" until those of us men who respect women as equals "take an active stance against the knuckle draggers who are simply males and not men."

# Best Columns: Europe

## Europe: Keeping Putin allies out of the EU

The European Union's "era of open arms" is over, said **Hubert Wetzels** in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (Germany). After Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, the EU was in a sweat to bring in new members from formerly communist areas of Eastern Europe to keep them out of Moscow's orbit. But Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic—which all joined back in 2004—show how such a policy could backfire. "Nationalist, EU-hostile, and autocratic parties" friendly to Vladimir Putin control the first two, while the Czechs just elected a Putin-curious prime minister. Last week, the EU's enlargement chief, Marta Kos, told the *Financial Times* that new members should now be admitted only "on probation." That's a second-tier status, and candidate countries—which include Ukraine, Moldova, and several former Yugoslav nations as well as Albania and Georgia—are complaining it's unfair. But letting in "democratically unreliable" countries that are susceptible to Putin's influence is asking for trouble. "I don't want to go down as the commissioner bringing in Trojan horses," Kos said. "The biggest fear I have is that the Russians will come in at the back door."

Still, Europe remains "determined to admit" some countries this decade, said **Konrad Kramar** in *Kurier* (Austria). The accession process is arduous, requiring countries both to adopt EU laws and reform their justice and regulatory systems to the point where they can properly enforce them. Montenegro, at least, looks like a shoo-in. The tiny Balkan nation of 620,000 is on track to meet its "ambitious goal" of completing all 35 membership "chapters" by the end of 2026. Plenty of other countries



A few more flags are needed.

may not make it, though, including Serbia, which has been backsliding. Kos lectured Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic about his "close ties to Russia," telling him to stop "supporting the regime of a murderer." Under him, Serbia not only "refuses to align itself with sanctions against Russia," said **Emmanuel Berretta** in *Le Point* (France). It even "grants Serbian citizenship to Russians," which would allow them to stream into the EU. Vucic has also cracked down brutally since last year's train station collapse in Novi Sad sparked huge protests against him. The EU Parliament accused his government of using "police brutality, torture, and sexual violence." At this point, Vucic "is no longer fooling anyone."

Finding a new member that's appropriately democratic is hard enough, said **Ales Gaube** in *Dnevnik* (Slovenia). Then you have to get current members to accept it unanimously. Putin buddy Viktor Orban of Hungary, though, has vowed to block Ukraine's accession, and he could stymie others. EU leaders also have to convince a skeptical public "that new members will strengthen the bloc—and not pose a threat to its own workforce." In fact, Europe badly needs an influx of new workers, said **Servet Yanatma** in *Euronews* (France). The EU population is expected to peak at about 453 million this very year "before beginning a gradual decline." Without significant immigration or enlargement, the bloc will have a third fewer people by the end of the century. Already, Italy and Spain face "imminent demographic collapse." Adding more members will be vital if we are to keep Europe from slowly fading away.

### UNITED KINGDOM

## Why we won't give back the Rosetta stone

**David Abulafia**  
*The Spectator*

Sorry, Egypt. The Rosetta stone belongs right where it is, in the British Museum, said David Abulafia. Now that the long-delayed Grand Egyptian Museum has opened, Egypt's antiquities ambassadors are knocking on the doors of museums that host Egyptian collections, and they have a "shopping list." On it is that "beautiful head of Nefertiti" housed in Berlin as well as a famous statue of Ramses II in Turin. In London, they're after the Rosetta stone. The slab from 196 B.C., inscribed with three translations of a decree, was "the key to the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphs" and is by far "the most visited object in the British

Museum." But in the Grand Egyptian Museum in Giza—the "final resting place of Tutankhamen," glittering with golden treasures—it would just look like debris, as "out of place as a dirty pair of trainers in the Athenaeum." In any case, it doesn't "illuminate the age of the Egyptian Pharaohs" like the Giza museum's other artifacts. The Rosetta stone was carved "when Egypt lay under the rule of the Ptolemies," a Greek dynasty. Its role in the "history of European scholarship" means its "importance is global." That's why it belongs in a universal museum, where anyone can see it for free. "Really there is only one such place: the British Museum."

### GREECE

## Where ancient blood feuds still claim lives

**Dimitris Efthymakis**  
*Protagon*

Greece may "wear the mask of the 21st century," said Dimitris Efthymakis. But much of it remains stuck in the old ways of petty clan disputes. This time warp was on display recently in the mountains of Crete, where the village of Vorizia "became a battlefield" in a family feud. One family was apparently building a house too close to the other's turf, and of course, both sides were heavily armed; gun ownership is "an addiction" in Greece. The house was blown up, and the two sides blasted each other with "pistols, rifles, Kalashnikovs," shooting over 2,000 bullets. Two people were killed; several others badly injured—and the wounded survivors had to be rushed to separate hospitals so the families

wouldn't start brawling in the waiting room. This vendetta goes way back, and in 1953 one family "went so far as to throw a grenade" at the home where the other was mourning a feud victim. But nowadays the warring houses have "neither poverty nor illiteracy" as an excuse. The killers "went to school, have cellphones, watch Netflix," but "still think as they did in 1900," when a twisted concept of honor justified shedding the blood of a neighbor. Now the "same person who uploads stories on Instagram one day may pull the trigger the next day because somebody's goats accidentally entered his field." Everyone has learned to read, but many still refuse to think.

## Noted

■ Coast Guard-run stores in Washington, D.C., and Virginia, which sell tax-free goods to service members and their families, now stock Trump-branded wine and cider. “The brave men and women of the USCG are pleased to be able to buy Trump wine and cider tax free,” said a Homeland Security official. *Forbes*



■ President Trump has placed a gold-scripted sign reading “The Oval Office” on the presidential office’s exterior wall. Rep. Jared Moskowitz (D-Fla.) said the new sign should be seen as a positive for the Oval Office, because it “means he won’t knock it down.” *The Guardian*

■ The number of military veterans designated 100% disabled by the Department of Veterans Affairs—and so eligible for tax-free payments of \$50,000 a year and benefits including free health care—has increased nearly ninefold since 2021, to about 1.5 million. That rise has coincided with a boom in for-profit consultants who charge vets up to \$20,000 in fees to coach them in how to qualify for the benefit, and sometimes urge them to stretch the truth. *The Washington Post*

■ Plastic surgeons in Washington, D.C., are seeing a surge in requests for “Mar-a-Lago face” treatments from Trump-world insiders. Women are requesting fillers, especially for lips, said surgeon Anita Kulkarni. Men are getting Botox, liposuction, and eyelid rejuvenation to appear “younger” and “more virile and masculine,” said surgeon Troy Pittman. *Axios*

## The Right: A think tank’s Nazi crack-up

There’s a battle raging inside the Heritage Foundation, said Michael Warren and John McCormack in *The Dispatch*, and it could determine the future of the GOP. The nation’s leading conservative think tank has been in crisis since late October, when its president, Kevin Roberts, posted a video that decried a “venomous coalition” for trying to cancel his pal Tucker Carlson over a softball interview with Nick Fuentes, a white-supremacist influencer and self-declared Hitler fan. Multiple senior Heritage staffers resigned in outrage, accusing Roberts of inviting neo-Nazis into the Republican establishment. In an all-hands Heritage meeting, Roberts called the video a “mistake,” denounced Fuentes, and listened as multiple Heritage employees read him “the riot act” for embracing bigotry. But one research assistant said she and other young staffers found nothing wrong with Roberts’ response, and that it wasn’t antisemitic to criticize Israel or to condemn Christian Zionism as a “heresy,” as Carlson did. Perhaps unwittingly, she gave voice to the rising faction that wants the GOP to move away from populist-infused conservatism and toward “something much darker and illiberal.”



Roberts: Made a ‘mistake’

To Vice President JD Vance, this clash of ideologies is mere “intramural squabbling,” said Gerard Baker in *The Wall Street Journal*. “The infighting is stupid,” he said last week, claiming it distracted from the Right’s real priorities: affordability, curbing

immigration, and national security. But his “breezy dismissal of the struggle to extirpate extremists from the right-wing coalition” is wrongheaded. It’s hard but necessary work that will ensure “moral and political hygiene for the conservative movement—and the country.” Fortunately, Fuentes and his ilk are “losing,” said Noah Rothman in *National Review*. Roberts was wrong to think his “recklessness” would have no consequences, but a courageous coalition of conservative lawmakers, institutions, and commentators banded together to condemn him, Carlson, and Fuentes. “It’s a heartening development that casts the Democrats’ spinelessness in confronting” their own antisemitism threat “in stark relief.”

That declaration of victory is premature, said David French in *The New York Times*. When President Trump rose to power, conservatives provided him a “special dispensation” to embrace “depravity and lawlessness” while still applying a standard of decency to everyone else. But the rot didn’t stay at the top, and many of the most prominent voices on the Right have grown “shriller, angrier, and, yes, more racist and more antisemitic.” Until principled conservatives demand decency from the leader of their movement, “Trump’s malignant influence will continue to metastasize,” and he’ll be free to hand the baton to a MAGA successor who will continue his “legacy of cruelty, bigotry, and rage.”

## Obesity drugs: Will Trump’s plan lower costs?

President Trump wants to “make America slim again,” said Kara Kennedy in *The Free Press*. Standing beside drug execs in the Oval Office last week, Trump announced deals with Eli Lilly and Novo Nordisk that will cut the price of their GLP-1 weight loss medicines, Zepbound and Wegovy, in return for a three-year exemption from his 100% pharmaceutical tariffs. Medicare recipients will pay a \$50 monthly co-pay for the drugs, which will also be available on TrumpRx.gov—a government-run site—for \$350 a month. That’s a steep discount on current list prices, which top \$1,000, and will expand access to the “single most effective intervention we have against obesity,” a disease that kills up to 500,000 Americans and costs the U.S. health care system some \$173 billion every year. With Trump, “it’s always hard to separate hype from substance,” said Larry Edelman in *The Boston Globe*, and wide coverage gaps remain. Medicare is barred from covering weight loss drugs, so patients must have a related health condition such as prediabetes or hypertension to be eligible. Still, Trump “deserves credit” for tackling the cost issue.

Lower GLP-1 prices “could benefit millions of Americans,” said *The Washington Post* in an editorial, but this is the wrong way to cut costs.

Trump’s ultimate goal is to peg U.S. drug prices to “the lower levels seen in other developed countries.” That “might sound appealing,” except that if a government has a heavy hand in drug pricing and distribution, it can also ration who gets it. In the U.K.’s socialized system, for example, obesity meds cost under \$200 a month—but “your BMI must hit 40, and you must have an additional *four* health conditions, to become eligible.” And it’s easy to imagine a future Democratic president using the TrumpRx precedent to force companies to adopt “their own ideological agenda.” That would be “a disaster for innovation and consumer choice.”

For Americans forced to pay out of pocket, “any price cut is welcome,” said Lisa Jarvis in *Bloomberg*. And getting Medicare to cover obesity drugs, even in a limited way, “is a positive step toward acknowledging and treating obesity as a disease,” not a lifestyle choice. But even \$149 a month, the advertised price for a starting dose of a still-in-development GLP-1 pill on TrumpRx, will be too big a burden for the many Americans “struggling to afford groceries.” For now, it’s too early to tell whether this deal “will actually change people’s lives” or whether the balance of benefits will ultimately favor Big Pharma or patients and taxpayers.

# Talking Points

## Mamdani: Why he won—and can he succeed?

Zohran Mamdani's victory last week has triggered "a political earthquake," said Mara Gay in *The New York Times*, and its aftershocks will reverberate far beyond New York City. The city's charismatic new mayor-elect energized a Democratic Party that has "seemed paralyzed by inaction" in the Trump era, overcoming deep skepticism from party leaders and Islamophobic attacks from opponents to defeat disgraced former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who ran as an independent. Powered by confidence, joy, and expert use of social media, the 34-year-old democratic socialist and Muslim immigrant relentlessly focused on affordability, with promises of fare-free city buses, universal child care, and a rent freeze for 2 million rent-stabilized apartments. His insistence that housing and child care "are basic needs" that should not be beyond anyone's reach resonated with young people, people of color, and even upper-middle-class whites struggling with the city's stratospheric cost of living. "What began as a race about affordability became a campaign for human dignity."



Mamdani: A very expensive agenda

Mamdani's win brings "many troubling implications," said John R. Puri in *National Review*. An "avowed enemy of capitalism" will soon run the world's financial capital, and "an anti-Zionist

crusader" will be charged with protecting the country's largest population of Jews from antisemitic violence. Mamdani's socialist agenda would "make New York less livable, less secure, and less prosperous." Mamdani will also be hard-pressed to fulfill his "ambitious—and expensive" promises, said Juliet Chung in *The Wall Street Journal*. He says he'll fund universal child care, estimated to cost about \$6 billion, by boosting the city's income tax from 3.88% to 5.88% for New Yorkers earning over \$1 million a year and by raising the state's corporate tax rate from 7.25% to 11.5%, on top of the city's corporate rate of 8.85%. His "ability to execute" depends heavily on "buy-in from state lawmakers," and Democratic Gov. Kathy Hochul has already said she opposes raising taxes.

New Yorkers "have had their hopes set incredibly high," said Adam Gabbatt in *The Guardian*, and it remains to be seen how much patience they'll have "as Mamdani settles into office." But this campaign "invigorated many New Yorkers like never before," so he goes into battle with a strong base of support. He has "rejuvenated the Left," and has shown the national Democratic establishment that "there is clearly an appetite for the party to do something different."

## Pelosi: The void she leaves behind

After nearly 40 years, former House speaker Nancy Pelosi is exiting Congress—and leaving "some huge stilettos to fill," said Erika D. Smith in *Bloomberg*. The 85-year-old Pelosi, who announced last week she won't seek reelection after her current term ends in 2027, will depart the lower chamber as "one of the most powerful politicians in American history." Her tenure as the first woman speaker was marked by her use of strategy, guile, and brute strength to bend the House to her will. Pelosi secured major "legislative achievements" for presidents Barack Obama and Joe Biden by marshaling the votes to pass the Affordable Care Act, the Inflation Reduction Act, and other major bills. Pelosi won a "legion of new fans" by overseeing both impeachments of President Trump, and by standing up to his bullying—even mocking him to his face. After Pelosi relinquished the speakership in 2022, she still exerted her influence by quietly pressuring the struggling President Biden to drop his 2024 reelection bid.

Pelosi may have been a "monumental figure" in U.S. politics, said Sara Pequeño in *USA Today*. But she also "didn't know when to leave." Had Pelosi left "on a high note" after her first stint as speaker in 2011, when Republicans won the House during

the tea party rebellion against President Obama, she would have enabled younger progressives to gain leadership positions and reinvigorate the party's brand. But she wouldn't relinquish power. Actually, the masterful Pelosi "earned the right to consider herself indispensable," said Michelle Goldberg in *The New York Times*. But Democrats have "a serious gerontocracy problem," and it's time for new blood. More than 50 House Democrats are 70 or older; three members died in office this year. Pelosi knows that she and the old guard must make way for dynamic young candidates who can make "deeply disaffected" voters feel hopeful about the future.

But as Pelosi eyes the exit, the Democrats have "no clear party leader," said Jason Kyle Howard in *Salon*. Pelosi's successor, Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-N.Y.) has "failed to assume the mantle of opposition leader," even as Democratic voters hunger for one. A recent *Politico* poll found that 32% of respondents "couldn't name the party's leader," and only 7% named Jeffries. As speaker, Pelosi showed Democrats how to win and wield power and how to effectively wage war against Trump. But the party hasn't been "absorbing her lessons" and now must start over.

## Wit & Wisdom

"Fortune knocks but once. Misfortune has much more patience."

Canadian writer  
Laurence Peter, quoted in  
*The Knowledge*

"Satire is traditionally the weapon of the powerless against the powerful."

Molly Ivins, quoted  
in *Deseret News*

"The mental and moral, like the muscular powers, are improved only by being used."

John Stuart Mill,  
quoted in *The DePaulia*

"Procrastination is opportunity's assassin."

Entrepreneur Victor Kiam,  
quoted in *Elite Business*

"Neither Pagan nor Mohametan nor Jew ought to be excluded from the civil rights of the commonwealth because of his religion."

Thomas Jefferson, quoted  
in *The New Republic*

"Poor is the pupil who does not surpass his master."

Leonardo Da Vinci, quoted  
in *Culture Custodian*

"Our job is not to solve every problem in the world, but to do our part with grace, integrity, and courage."

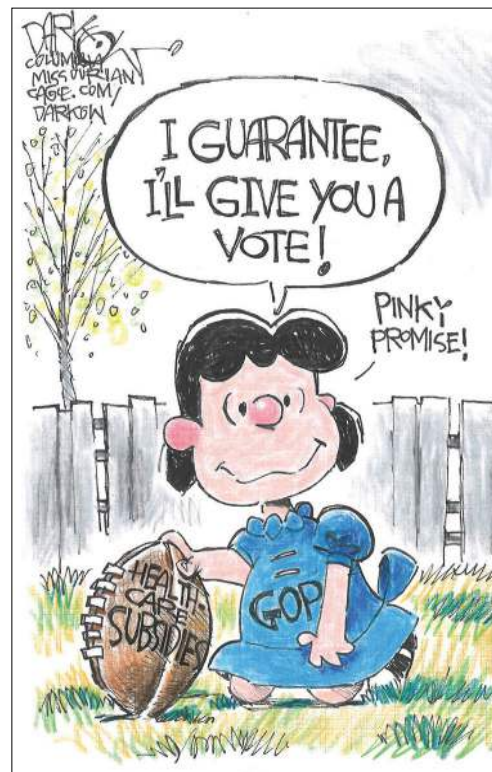
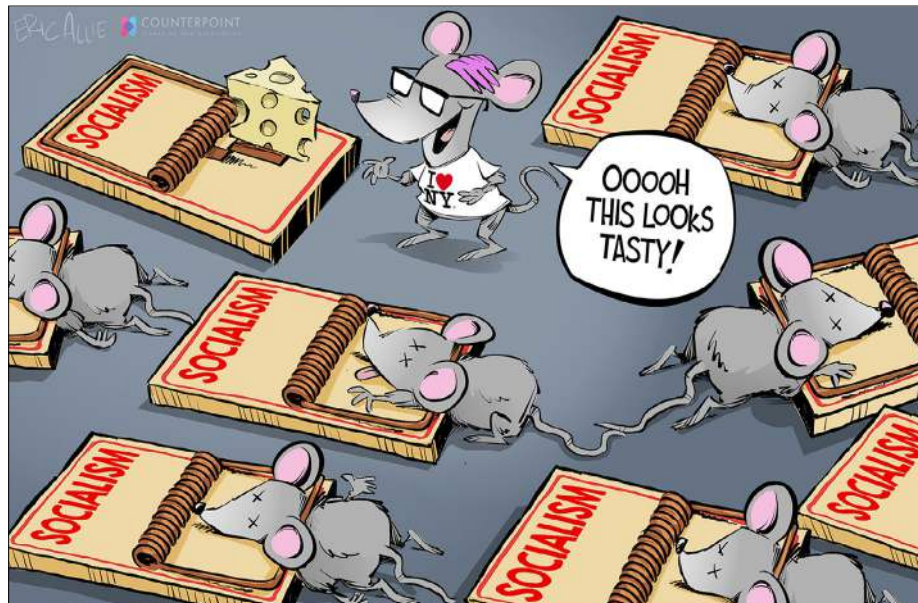
Cornel West,  
quoted in *Salvos*

## Poll Watch

■ **74%** of adults believe Congress should extend the Affordable Care Act subsidies that Republicans cut in their budget, including **94%** of Democrats, **76%** of independents, and **50%** of Republicans.  
KFF

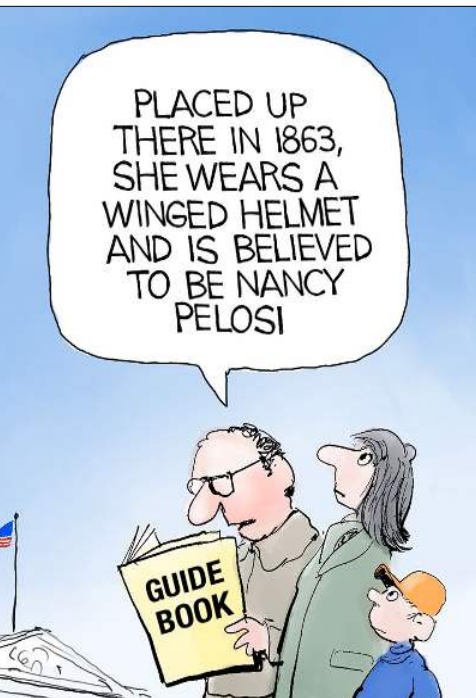
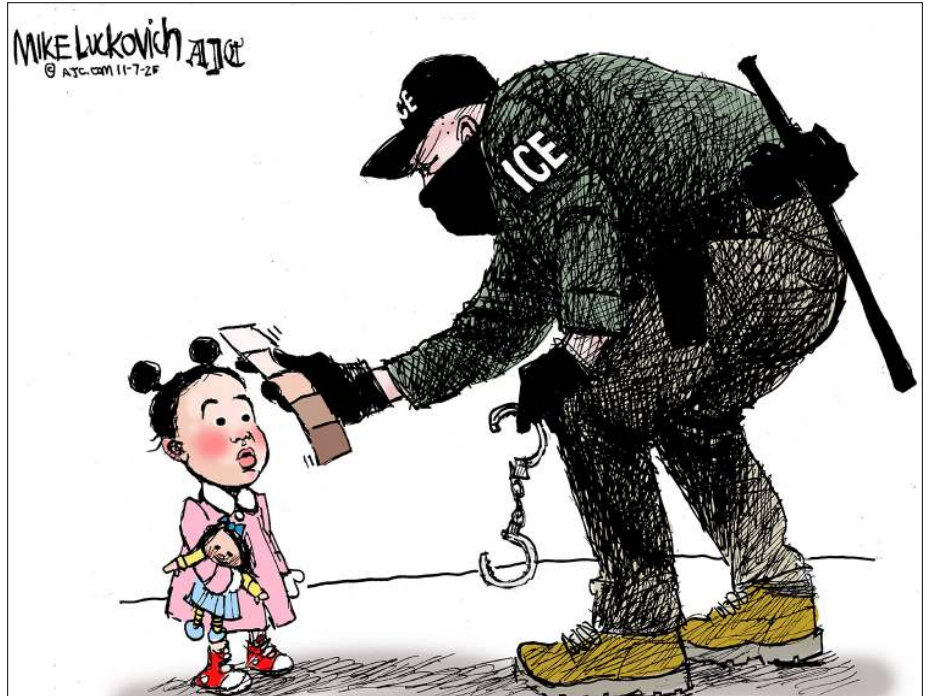
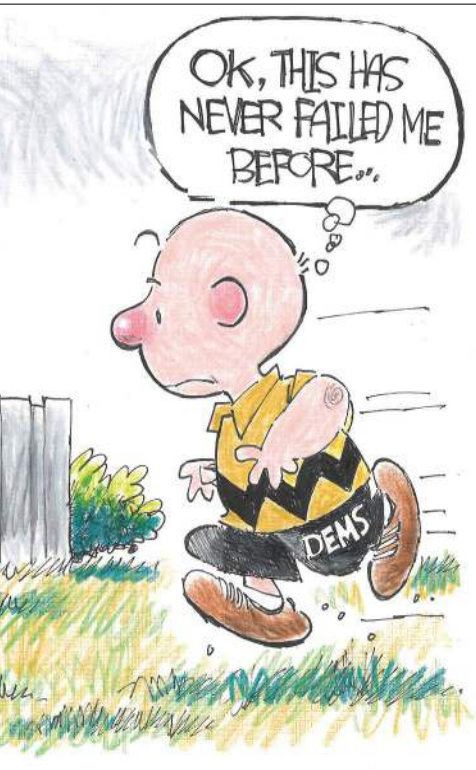
■ **49%** of adults 65 or older say they are aging very or extremely well. **60%** rate their mental health as excellent or very good, and **66%** say they feel optimistic. Only **37%** rate their physical health as excellent or very good.  
Pew Research Center

# Pick of the Week's Cartoons



# Pick of the Week's Cartoons

For more political cartoons, visit:  
[theweek.com/cartoons](http://theweek.com/cartoons)



## AI agents: When bots browse the web

The battle over the future of web browsing is here, said Shirin Ghaffary and Matt Day in *Bloomberg*. Amazon last week sued the artificial intelligence startup Perplexity because its new AI-powered web browser, Comet, can “make purchases on a real person’s behalf.” The world’s largest online retailer says this amounts to “computer fraud” when not disclosed. The clash between the two companies offers “an early glimpse into a looming debate” over “agentic artificial intelligence.” Perplexity is among several tech firms, including Google and OpenAI, racing “to rethink the traditional web browser around AI,” with automated agents that can complete tasks like emailing or shopping. Amazon, which is developing its own AI-powered shopping agents, has reason to worry: If more bots do the shopping for humans, that poses “a significant threat to Amazon’s lucrative advertising business.”

It makes sense for AI companies to jump into the browser game, said David Pierce in *The Verge*. Your browser holds “a vast trove of data about you”—including everywhere you go online, and what you do there—which can be used to precisely target ads that generate revenue. And it also “contains the most important input system on the internet,” a box to do Google searches. “If AI interactions are going to usurp Google searches, they have to



Letting robots do the shopping

be that easy.” After testing several AI browsers, I’m a convert, said Nicole Nguyen in *The Wall Street Journal*. The best part of such a browser is that it has “a built-in chatbot that can see what’s open in your tabs.” You can type questions, like “Is *this* the best price?” and it will “instantly understand the context” and complete tasks based on the answers. I’ve even let OpenAI’s new browser, Atlas, shop for cheap flights on its own “while I did other stuff.”

It’s risky “letting AI this deep into your life,” said Geoffrey A. Fowler in *The Washington Post*. AI agents “are still prone to mistakes—and when an agent has access to a browser with your login credentials and payment info, that’s a lot of power to hand over.” It also “brings privacy risks that are hard to understand, much less control.” OpenAI’s Atlas “doesn’t just log which websites you visit; it also stores ‘memories’ of what you look at and do on those sites,” going a step beyond traditional cookies. Such agentic systems are ripe for abuse by cybercriminals, said Hiawatha Bray in *The Boston Globe*. All a hacker needs to do is “hide malicious code inside a webpage” that a bot might pull up. If the code tells my browser to open my password management system, thieves could have “total access to my banking and credit accounts.” For now, “sticking to my dumb old browser seems like the smart move.”

### Innovation of the week

A smart ring could one day replace the traditional computer mouse, said Maryna Holovnova in *New Atlas*. That’s the vision of Prolo, a New York-based startup that launched a prototype of the wearable gadget on Kickstarter last month, where it

“got funded in nine minutes.”

Resembling an elegant piece of jewelry, the Prolo ring fits on your index finger and boasts a trackpad operated by the thumb, a six-axis

motion sensor, and a second trackpad controllable by the index finger on your other hand. All of these enable you to move a computer’s cursor without removing your hands from the keyboard. The ring also recognizes more than 40 air gestures that “can be programmed for your individual needs,” from “playing YouTube videos to switching between windows.”



### Bytes: What’s new in tech

#### ■ Anger at Instagram’s PG-13 ratings

The Motion Picture Association has a message for Instagram, said Isabella Simonetti in *The Wall Street Journal*: Stop saying your teen safety effort is “PG-13.” Dogged by criticism over the safety of its platform for teen users, Instagram announced in October it would implement “a new system to limit what young people can see that is consistent with PG-13 movie ratings.” The MPA, which has been administering parental-guidance ratings for films since 1968, says that is “highly misleading.” Its ratings are assigned by a group of parents who have children between ages 5 and 15 when they start their roles. But Instagram-owner Meta’s content moderation, the MPA notes in a cease and desist letter, appears “to rely heavily on artificial intelligence”

#### ■ No foreign AI chips in China

A recent Chinese mandate that new state-funded data centers use only domestically made chips deals a devastating blow to Nvidia’s hopes of a rebound in the country, said Reuters. The move is “one of China’s most aggressive steps yet to eliminate foreign technology from its critical infrastructure.” Jensen Huang, CEO of U.S.-based Nvidia, has repeatedly lobbied President Trump to let his firm sell more AI chips to China, arguing it is in America’s interest to “keep its superpower

rival’s AI industry dependent on U.S. hardware.” An October trade summit between Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping ended with no agreement on lifting a block on exports of Nvidia’s most advanced chips to China. “Excluding foreign chipmakers like Nvidia from big state projects would eliminate a significant portion of their revenue,” even if some chip trade eventually resumes. Construction of one facility in northwestern China was recently “suspended before breaking ground” because it “had planned to deploy Nvidia chips.”

#### ■ CarPlay hits a roadblock

The relationship between Detroit and Silicon Valley is crumbling, said Patrick George in *The Atlantic*. General Motors last month announced that “new cars won’t support” Apple CarPlay or its Google counterpart, Android Auto. Some drivers consider CarPlay so important that dropping it is tantamount to “removing cupholders.” But the auto industry may be getting tired of giving away dashboard real estate to tech companies for nothing. GM has its own phone-mirroring program, but “access to the full suite of software requires its own data plan”—and the cheapest plan costs \$10 a month. Unfortunately, it seems like Apple’s CarPlay days may be numbered. Get ready for the days “when your car’s technology expenses are another line item on the credit-card statement.”

# Health & Science

## Is melatonin bad for your heart?

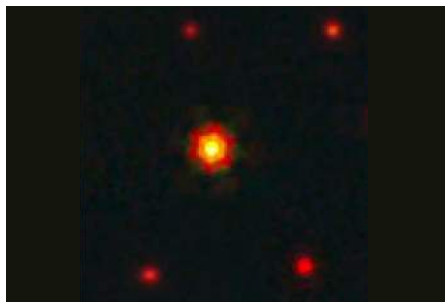
People who took prescribed melatonin for more than a year were more likely to develop heart failure, be hospitalized, or die within five years than those who did not, a large new analysis suggests. The study, which has not yet been peer-reviewed and has drawn a mixed response from sleep medicine experts, looked at the health records of more than 130,000 adults with chronic insomnia. Over the study period, about 3,000 long-term users of the hormone supplement developed heart failure for the first time, compared with 1,800 nonusers. The results surprised even the study's authors. "Melatonin is generally viewed as very safe," lead

author Ekenedilichukwu Nnadi, from SUNY Downstate in Brooklyn, tells *The Washington Post*, "so we didn't expect to see a clear signal linking long-term use with higher rates of heart failure." Experts caution that the findings show only correlation, not causation. And the study relied on prescription data, meaning some non-users may have taken over-the-counter melatonin. Insomnia itself, rather than melatonin, may also play a role in worsening heart health. Nevertheless, the results could challenge the common view of melatonin—which isn't federally regulated as a drug because it is classed as a dietary supplement—as a harmless "natural" sleep aid. "The takeaway isn't that melatonin



*Rethinking that nightly pill*

is 'bad' or that everyone should stop taking it," says Nnadi. "It's that we shouldn't assume something is risk-free just because it's natural or sold over the counter."



*A big red dot named BiRD*

### Ancient monster of a black hole

Astronomers using the James Webb Space Telescope have found an ancient, supermassive black hole with a mass about 100 million times that of the sun, a discovery that could help explain how such black holes grew so quickly in the early universe. Nicknamed BiRD, short for Big Red Dot, the black hole existed around 4 billion years after the Big Bang, during a period known as "cosmic noon." Its light has been traveling toward Earth for 10 billion years. Although it appears very bright in infrared, BiRD is oddly absent from X-ray and radio surveys, an anomaly that suggests it may be cloaked in thick layers of dust and gas that trap high-energy radiation while allowing infrared light to escape. BiRD appears to belong to a mysterious class of compact objects known as little red dots—believed to be "seed" black holes still buried in their dusty cocoons—but it is much bigger than any of those. Study leader Federica Loiacono says the plan now is to examine little red dots closer to Earth, which can be studied in greater detail. With its ability to see so far that it is effectively peering into the distant past, the James Webb telescope "has opened a new frontier in extragalactic astrophysics, revealing objects we didn't even suspect existed," she tells *Space.com*. "And we're only at the beginning of this adventure."

### A short walk prevents dementia

Walking as little as 3,000 steps a day may help slow the progression of dementia in older people, reports *The Guardian*. In a 14-year study at Mass General Brigham hospital, researchers tracked nearly 300 adults ages 50 to 90 who were cognitively healthy at the start, using pedometers to monitor activity and PET scans to detect Alzheimer's-related brain changes. They found that 3,000 steps a day appeared to delay cognitive decline by about three years, while 5,000 to 7,000 steps daily delayed it by roughly seven years. Participants with elevated levels of amyloid—a toxic brain protein linked to Alzheimer's—experienced slower buildup of another harmful protein, tau, and a slower rate of cognitive decline if they were more physically active. Those who were sedentary saw faster deterioration. Though the researchers cannot rule out that early Alzheimer's changes might make people less active, lead author Wai-Ying Yau calls the results encouraging. "We're encouraging older people who are at risk of Alzheimer's to consider making small changes to their activity levels," she says, "to build sustained habits that protect or benefit their brain and cognitive health."

### Covid's link to autism

Children may face a higher risk of autism and other developmental disorders if their mothers had Covid during pregnancy, a new study suggests. Researchers from Massachusetts General Hospital analyzed more than 18,000 births during the first big Covid wave, between March 2020 and May 2021. They found that 16% of children born to mothers who contracted the disease during pregnancy were diagnosed with a neurodevelopmental disorder by age 3, compared with less than 10% of those whose mothers remained uninfected. The link was strongest in cases where infection occurred in the third trimester and among boys, whose developing brains appear more vulnerable to maternal immune responses. The most common diagnoses included speech and motor delays as well as autism, which was found in 2.7% of exposed children versus just 1.1% of others. "These findings highlight that Covid, like many other infections in pregnancy, may pose risks not only to the mother but also to fetal brain development," senior author Andrea Edlow tells *CNN.com*. "They also support the importance of trying to prevent Covid infection in pregnancy."

### How orcas eat great whites

Killer whales have been recorded flipping over great white sharks off the coast of Mexico in order to feast on their livers. The predation technique had previously been seen only in South Africa, where white shark carcasses with their livers torn out washed ashore a few years ago. Marine biologist Erick Higuera captured footage of a pod of orcas in the Gulf of California forcing a juvenile shark onto its back to make it freeze in a trancelike state known as "tonic



*Going for the liver*

immobility." The killer whales then dragged their prey below the surface, before one of them re-emerged minutes later with the liver and passed it around the pod like a dish at Thanksgiving dinner. The nutrient-rich organ is "the only thing that's really worth it for their time," Taylor Chapple, a marine ecologist at Oregon State University who was not involved with the research, tells *The New York Times*. "It's sort of like they're going for the cheeseburger surrounded by a bunch of celery."

# Review of Reviews: Books

## Book of the week

### Book of Lives: A Memoir of Sorts

by Margaret Atwood (Doubleday, \$35)

"*Book of Lives* might as well be one of Margaret Atwood's novels," said Robert Allen Papinchak in the *Los Angeles Times*. A 624-page "tour de force," it's "populated by a large cast of beguiling characters" and is "grounded by a compelling storyline," that of a brilliant writer who has lived 86 years on this earth while channeling her response to that life into more than 70 books in all genres. Born in Ottawa in 1939, Atwood was raised by two accomplished and resourceful parents, including an entomologist father whose insect studies pulled the family out into the wilds for six months of every year. By 6, "Peggy" Atwood had written her first poetry collection. When she finished high school, her yearbook reported that "Peggy's not-so-secret ambition is to write THE Canadian novel."

Before she started *Book of Lives*, Atwood had thought a book about her life would be boring, said Blake Morrison in *The Guardian*. "Alcoholic excess, debauched parties, and sexual transgressions would



Atwood: Multiple lives in one

have perked things up, but she hasn't lived that way." Still, she takes pleasure in the multiplicity of identities she's worn over the years by way of nature, chance, or reputation: "nerdy brainiac, waifish poet, Medusa-eyed feminist, uncanny prophet." And when she isn't doling out aphoristic wisdom or sharing her wackier side, such as a faith in horoscopes and exorcists, she's making connections between her life and her work. It was her time at Harvard as a

1960s graduate student that inspired the patriarchal puritanical nation she created in her landmark 1985 novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*. In between, she published an award-winning first book of poetry; met the fellow writer Graeme Gibson, who'd be her life partner for half a century; and broke into mainstream consciousness with a 1972 survey of Canadian literature.

*Book of Lives* isn't Atwood at her best, said Dwight Garner in *The New York Times*. "Largely shapeless," it "frequently reads like a Politburo speech, in the sense that it takes its audience for granted." However, "its colors deepen when two topics are visible": Atwood's lifelong love of nature and "her abiding interest in her own dark side." She enjoys that other people fear her when she judges them moral or intellectual inferiors. To me, lulls in the book were hard to find, said Leigh Haber in *The Boston Globe*. Atwood's "ingeniousness and sly wit" are "evident on every page," as each anecdote she shares spins off canny quips and morsels of life wisdom. We're just lucky she didn't abandon the project before she started. "*Book of Lives* has to be the most spectacular, hilarious, and generous autobiography of the last quarter century—or ever."

## Novel of the week

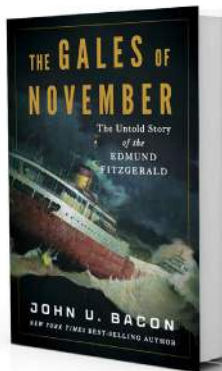
### Tom's Crossing

by Mark Z. Danielewski (Pantheon, \$40)

"This is a book like a mountain," said Jacob Brogan in *The Washington Post*. A 1,200-page adventure story, "and a tremendous one at that," the latest novel from the author of the 2000 cult novel *House of Leaves* is set in 1982 Utah and follows 16-year-old Kalin March as he attempts to fulfill his friend Tom's deathbed request by stealing two horses and leading them to freedom high in the mountains. Kalin is joined in his mission by Tom's sister and Tom's ghost, and over five days, "what can go wrong does, and then some," particularly because the wealthy family that owns the horses tries to frame the teens for a graver crime, intensifying the chase. "Some readers may find *Tom's Crossing* ponderous and bloated, with too many forks in the trail," said Hamilton Cain in *The New York Times*. "I advise patience and fortitude," because as author Mark Z. Danielewski unfolds his tale in "a tangy vernacular," he "blends police procedural, the horror of Stephen King, and the post-modern density of David Foster Wallace." Meanwhile, Danielewski's "love of life in all its guises" brightens every page. In short, "this is peak maximalist fiction."

### The Gales of November: The Untold Story of the Edmund Fitzgerald

by John U. Bacon (Liveright, \$35)



The sinking of the SS *Edmund Fitzgerald* is a story that's been told many times before, "but never has it been told better," said John J. Miller in *The Wall Street Journal*. In his current best seller, author John U. Bacon "blends the talents of a nar-

rative historian with the skills of a journalist," using interviews with family members of the 29 men who died on the enormous freighter to give the tragedy fresh resonance. The wreck wouldn't be as widely remembered if not for Gordon Lightfoot's doleful 1976 hit ballad about the recent Lake Superior disaster, and Bacon details the song's origins too. Mostly, though, he brings to life the world that the men lived in—with lakes as vast as seas connecting the ports that established the Midwest as an industrial powerhouse.

The Fitz, as the 729-foot-long vessel was

sometimes called, was "already famous in shipping circles when, in November 1975, it ran into one of the nastiest Lake Superior storms on record," said Kevin Duchscher in *The Minnesota Star Tribune*. Launched in 1958, it was as long and narrow as a wooden ruler, built to fit through the locks connecting Superior and Lake Huron, and it regularly set the top mark for annual cargo hauls. As usual, it was overloaded with taconite iron ore when it mistimed its run to the locks on the ship's final voyage of the season. The storm it sailed into broke it in half and sunk its crew before the captain ever issued a distress signal, said Steve Nathans-Kelly in the *Chicago Review of Books*. Even so, Bacon's account is "at its most captivating" as it re-creates that night, "minute by agonizing minute."

"Bacon does not dwell too much on any theory of how the Fitz sank, said Katie Gill in the Jackson, Miss., *Clarion-Ledger*. Icy winds reached 100 mph and the waves 50 feet as the veteran captain made choices that may have doomed the entire crew. Bacon, to his credit, "lets no man go unrecognized." We learn that the captain was days from retirement but also that 22-year-old deckhand Bruce Hudson had been about to become a father for the first time. The result is not only moving. It's "perhaps the most thorough account we'll ever get."

# The Book List

## Best books...chosen by Louise Penny

Louise Penny's award-winning *Chief Inspector Armand Gamache* series now spans two decades and 20 novels. The latest, *The Black Wolf*, is a New York Times No. 1 best seller and finds an injured Gamache leading a covert probe into a growing terrorist threat.



**The Killing Stones** by Ann Cleeves (2025). It's her new series, bringing back Detective Inspector Jimmy Perez from her *Shetland* series. I loved the character and was so anxious to know what was happening in his life. Here's the answer, brilliantly realized.

**Far From the Tree** by Andrew Solomon (2012). I met Andrew at the Nantucket Book Festival. At the time I hadn't read any of his works, but I went to his talk and was struck by how thoughtful, gentle, fearless he was. And his writing is exactly the same. This nonfiction book is about what happens when parents are raising a child not at all like themselves physically, intellectually, in temperament or personality. It's riveting, filled with insight, honesty, love, forgiveness, struggle, understanding.

**Dark Star** by Alan Strachan (2018). I love biographies, and while I'd never read one about actress Vivien Leigh, this one came so highly recommended that I picked it up in hardcover. What a great read about a complex, fascinating, troubled woman.

**Factfulness** by Hans Rosling (2018). Ahhh, a nonfiction book that's about our world and is actually hopeful. *Factfulness* takes the long view and invites us to see beyond what appears to be a morass into a future that is brighter than we think. Less threatening than we fear. I for one needed this book.

**The Golden Mole** by Katherine Rundell (2022). I found this remarkable book thanks to the charity the Queen's Reading Room. Bill Bryson called it "a rare and magical book." I'm glad he found the words because I have been left speechless by this glorious work about glorious living creatures I knew nothing about.

**The Finest Hotel in Kabul** by Lyse Doucet (2025). This is the biography of a hotel as told through the eyes not of the kings and presidents and billionaires who stayed there but the people who served them. It's their story, as they lived through the seismic changes in Afghanistan over the past decades. It's lyrical, warm, funny, shocking, horrifying, and beautiful. It's my favorite read this year.

## Also of interest...in the biggest questions

### Taking Religion Seriously

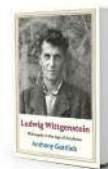
by Charles Murray (Encounter, \$30)



Charles Murray's surprising new book isn't "some dry defense of religion in general," said Barton Swaim in *The Wall Street Journal*. Instead, the co-author of *The Bell Curve* has written a "highly personal" account of his gradual embrace of Christianity's core stories. His reading led him first to conclude that crediting creation to a divine force is sensible, then that the Resurrection is probably not mere invention. Though he's no full-on convert, "it's clear that *something* happened to him."

### Ludwig Wittgenstein

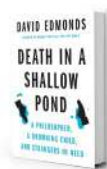
by Anthony Gottlieb (Yale, \$28)



Other biographers have taken deeper dives into Ludwig Wittgenstein's thinking, said Nikhil Krishnan in *The New York Times*. Author and journalist Anthony Gottlieb instead focuses on the Austrian-born philosopher's life story in this slim new book. But "precisely because it doesn't try to say everything," Gottlieb's narrowed treatment "illuminates everything it touches." Wittgenstein isn't just a great mind here. He's a restive, troubled, protean son of great wealth. Most of all, he's "more human."

### Death in a Shallow Pond

by David Edmonds (Princeton, \$28)



"David Edmonds is a lucid explainer of knotty philosophical tangles," said Becca Rothfeld in *The Washington Post*. The "riveting" first half of his new book provides an intellectual history of effective altruism, a philosophy favored by tech moguls that prioritizes maximizing the impact of charitable giving. But while Edmonds remains sharp when he turns to the common arguments against EA and its focus on the future, the back-and-forth proves "more of a slog."

### The Future of Truth

by Werner Herzog (Penguin, \$26)



Werner Herzog seems "somewhat at peace with the demise of the conventional notion of truth," said Siddhartha Mahanta in *The New Republic*. In his new book, the director touches on Potemkin villages, Nero's imposters, and the deceptions of filmmaking to reassure readers that humans have always deceived and been willing to be deceived. "Perhaps it's only natural, then, that artificial intelligence appears to fill him with both dread and a terrible sense of wonder."

## Author of the week

### Helen DeWitt

Helen DeWitt is finally ready to move on, said **Alexandra Alter** in *The New York Times*. The book that was supposed to get her unstuck, *Your Name Here*, has just been published, nearly 20 years after she and a younger collaborator started it. "I thought we could write something in a few weeks, sell it off, get some money," she says. In 2006, the Maryland



native was in her 40s and coming off a difficult few years. After her first novel, *The Last Samurai*, was published

in 2000 to great acclaim (it remains *New York* magazine's choice for best book of the century), her publisher stalled a follow-up, and she had a breakdown and attempted suicide. Following psychiatric treatment, she remembered a 20-something journalist she'd met in a London pub and a dazzling email he'd sent her. They could knock out a novel together quickly, she thought. But she was wrong.

Both DeWitt and her co-author, Ilya Gridneff, now speak of *Your Name Here* as a haunting project, said **Sophia Nguyen** in *The Washington Post*. DeWitt labels it an "albatross." It started as a collision of narratives about fictional DeWitt and Gridneff stand-ins. Then they folded in their email exchanges, several second-person narrators, dozens of images, and text in Arabic. It was to be a book about the impossibility of coherence, and their reward for achieving their aim was having to wait 18 years after an excerpt appeared to finally see all 600 pages in print. While the novel is still puzzling some critics, it has also been chosen by *Publishers Weekly* as one of the 10 best books of the year. And its release means DeWitt can now focus on the unsold manuscripts already waiting on her hard drive, the total number of which, she says, is "impossible to say."

## Exhibit of the week

## Yoko Ono: Music of the Mind

Museum of Contemporary Art,  
Chicago, through Feb. 22

“She was, she is, a cultural punch line,” said Christopher Borrelli in the *Chicago Tribune*. But before anyone started blaming Yoko Ono for breaking up the Beatles, she was several years into what’s become a seven-decade career of creating conceptual art “so original and challenging,” and eventually so influential, that “the joke is really on the know-nothings.” The career retrospective of her work now showing in Chicago after stops in Düsseldorf and London gathers more than 200 pieces, and it’s at once “epic but intimate, impossibly earnest but full of irony.” Ono’s work often encourages participation, so one piece invites you to step into a sack and another asks you to stick your arm through a canvas and shake hands with anyone on the other side. But while humor is a near constant, her most revealing requests urge us to try to repair cups and dishes that have been shattered to bits. “She asks for the impossible, but she also means it.”

By persuading her audience to think in



Ono in 1967

fresh ways, “Ono gave birth to a strange new species of artistic success,” said Sebastian Smee in *The Washington Post*. Born in Tokyo in 1933, she had survived the U.S. firebombings of 1945, then moved to America in 1952 shortly before enrolling in college. Through her first husband, composer Toshi Ichiyanagi, she met and befriended John Cage, who inspired the

work she created in the early ’60s as a leading participant in Fluxus, a movement bent on erasing the boundaries between life and art. While the current retrospective includes films, music, drawings, and the ladder John Lennon climbed when he met her at one of her 1966 gallery shows, “the best works are sets of instructions.” *Number Piece I* directs: “Count all the words in the book instead of reading them,” while *Disappearing Piece* suggests: “Boil water.” In 1964’s *Cut Piece*, Ono knelt onstage and invited audience members to take turns cutting away her clothing, and it’s disturbing to see people take advantage of the offer. But Ono viewed the work as a criticism of other artists for typically giving only what they wanted to give. “I wanted people to take whatever they wanted,” she explained.

“Much of Ono’s work is an invitation to see differently, to shift perspective,” said Vasia Rigou in *New City*. Twenty-nine years after Lennon was fatally shot, Ono made *A Hole*, a work consisting of a pane of glass pierced by a bullet. The instructions to this piece read, “Go to the other side of the glass and see through the hole.” Ono knew exactly what the null space would evoke for anyone who loved Lennon. “The violence is evident, but so is the possibility of looking beyond it.”



## Rosalía

Lux

★★★★★

Rosalía’s first album in three years “sounds like absolutely nothing else in music right now,” said Julyssa Lopez in *Rolling Stone*. Already, the 33-year-old Spanish singer, songwriter, and producer had established herself as “pop’s most provocative chaos agent,” proving with 2018’s *El Mal Querer* and 2022’s *Motomami* how much pop and reggaeton could be stretched and expanded by an adventurous conservatory-trained flamenco vocalist. Even so, *Lux*

is the two-time Grammy winner’s “most astonishing offer yet,” a “gorgeous, gutting” record that “feels like a timeless work of art” and finds Rosalía singing in 14 languages, tying together opera references, classical flourishes, and the lives of numerous Catholic saints. The album is “not a dopamine machine like *Motomami*,” said Gio Santiago in *Pitchfork*. “But it rewards listeners who ache for more from pop artists: more feeling, more risk.” For inspiration, Rosalía studied feminist theory and historical accounts of female saints, then constructed a personal creed that imagines a more equal human relationship with the almighty. “When God descends, I ascend, and we’ll meet halfway,” she sings on “Magnolia.”

“*Lux* demands the listener submit themselves to its author,” said Alexis Petridis in *The Guardian*. It sounds “closer to classical music” than anything else riding in the upper echelons of the pop album charts, and it includes guest appearances from both the London Symphony Orchestra and Björk, an apparent inspiration. Despite the record’s complexity, “you don’t need to know what’s going on” to find striking moments among its “uniformly beautiful” songs, especially because Rosalía’s vocal performances are “spectacular fireworks displays of talent.” Albums this intense require resetting expectations, said Kelefa Sanneh in *The New Yorker*. “*Lux* wants to make us stop whatever we’re doing and listen.” There are moments, as in “Yugular,” when the music is “easier to admire than to enjoy.” But if *Lux* is less broadly appealing than albums that ask less, “it’s also much harder to forget.”

## Mavis Staples

Sad and Beautiful World

★★★★★



“Even if we don’t always deserve Mavis Staples, we need her,” said Andrew Guldén in *American Highways*. As has been true for more than seven decades, the 86-year-old gospel,

soul, and rock icon is singing with hope on her latest album, but she’s “not sugarcoating a damn thing about the backward mess we somehow find ourselves in.” The opening track, Tom Waits and Kathleen Brennan’s “Chicago,” finds Staples’ voice “grittier than it’s ever been, but still just as beautiful.” Backed by guitarists Derek Trucks and Buddy Guy, she transforms the song into her own family’s story of migrating from the South to the Windy City. Kevin Morby’s “Beautiful Strangers” catalogs tragic gun violence and police brutality, but the track here also extends the album’s “beyond stellar” guest list by way of MJ Lenderman’s subtle guitar riffs. “Staples has always used her faith as a light,” said David Hutcheon in *Mojo*. Whether singing a new song, “Human Mind,” written for her by Hozier and Allison Russell, or revisiting Curtis Mayfield’s “We Got to Have Peace,” she “reaches not for retribution but for the hope that we will be able to start anew tomorrow.”

# Review of Reviews: Film & TV

## Jay Kelly

Directed by Noah Baumbach  
(R)



A movie star looks back on his flawed life.

George Clooney's newest film is "the definition of a movie that goes down easy," said Owen Gleiberman in *Variety*. Clooney plays the title character, an aging, George Clooney-like movie star, and director Noah Baumbach brings "a great deal of care and affection" to the task of showing how screen fame shapes a life. "But as much as I enjoyed a lot of *Jay Kelly*, on some level I didn't buy it," because the story demands that we believe Jay has a hidden cold side that Clooney is simply too warm and engaging to sell. The whole endeavor feels like "celebrity navel-gazing on an Olympian scale," said Johnny Oleksinski in the *New York Post*. Jay, realizing that he's been so focused on his career that he's neglected even his two daughters, chooses to accept



Clooney as Kelly: Made for the role

drives *Jay Kelly*: the Teflon charisma of Clooney," said Bilge Ebiri in *NYMAG.com*. Like its star, the film, which will hit Netflix soon after its theatrical release, glides along until it finally reveals that charisma can rob other people of their lives. "Clooney plays it all so cool that he and the movie both sneak up on us." And then you realize: He's just given "the performance of his life."

## Sentimental Value

Directed by Joachim Trier  
(R)



Another difficult dad seeks to make amends.

Joachim Trier's "breathtaking" new film "cements his status as one of the working masters," said Brian Tallerico in *RogerEbert.com*. The Scandinavian director, best known for 2021's *The Worst Person in the World*, has constructed a drama of his own about a father in the film business who's struggling to reconnect with his previously neglected daughters. But Trier's version is akin to "great fiction unfolding in feature film form." Though we know there will be emotional breakthroughs for the central characters, "they don't come melodramatically; they come gradually, patiently, and believably." Stellan Skarsgard plays a director who is turned down when he asks his actress daughter to star in his autobiographical new film, said Manohla Dargis



Oscar hopefuls Skarsgard and Reinsve

in *The New York Times*, and because Skarsgard appears in so many roles, "I almost forgot how good he can be." He and his daughter Nora, played by *Worst Person* standout Renate Reinsve, are both "greedily self-involved and irresistibly charismatic people," and Skarsgard and Reinsve prove to be "beautifully in sync." Both will be Oscar contenders, said Amy Nicholson in the *Los Angeles Times*, even though Elle Fanning is better still as the American star who takes the role Nora rejected. Trier, meanwhile, comes across as divided. He flirts with making *Sentimental Value* a feisty industry satire yet "seems very aware that the audience for his kind of niche hit wants to sniffle at delicate emotions." His title, in fact, "seems to be as much about that as anything."

## All's Fair: Television's most hated show

"It's truly baffling how terrible *All's Fair* is," said Kayleigh Donaldson in *The Wrap*. The new Hulu legal soap opera featuring Kim Kardashian and many capable female co-stars has easily earned the worst reviews of 2025: When the show's Rotten Tomatoes score climbed a few points above 0, it counted as a victory. In theory, the series should be fun. Kardashian and Naomi Watts play L.A. divorce lawyers who've created a high-flying all-female firm that helps other women stick it to their horrible ex-husbands, and veteran hitmaker Ryan Murphy has assembled a skilled cast that also includes Glenn

Close, Teyana Taylor, Niecy Nash, and Sarah Paulson. Apparently, though, the producer's signature snark "has rotted into contempt, for audience and art alike," so much so that "one wonders if Murphy is engaged in some sort of experiment to see if he can get away with making the most transparently terrible show on Disney's dime."

Some bad TV shows are "ripe for hate-watching" because they're messy and fun, said Kelly Lawler in *USA Today*. But not only is *All's Fair* saddled with "scripts worse than what ChatGPT was spitting out two years ago" and "acting

worse than your local Christmas pageant." It's also "so stilted, artificial, and awkward" that watching it is painful. Still, even *The Guardian's* assertion that it's the worst TV show of all time undersells what *All's Fair's* arrival represents, said Steven Zeitchik in *The Hollywood Reporter*. "When the history of 21st-century entertainment is written, I believe we will look at *All's Fair* as a watershed, the moment that television itself, as a place where new and coherent stories were for decades told, began to give way to something more meaning-free, more recycled, more nothing." The series seems intended to



Legal eagles Kardashian and Watts

produce meaningless images and one-liners that are conducive to circulating as memes because emptiness is the flavor of the moment on social media and may be for years to come. All will be great at creating shows like this. And because critics have proved powerless to prevent *All's Fair* from winning huge ratings, "expect to see more like it."

## Streaming tips

Remembering  
Diane LaddAlice Doesn't Live Here  
Anymore

Diane Ladd, who died Nov. 3, wasn't a megawatt star, but she was a versatile actress whose performances were unfailingly powerful. She earned her first Oscar nomination for her portrayal of Flo, a sharp-tongued Southern waitress, in this early Martin Scorsese feature. *\$4 on demand*

## Wild at Heart

Ladd did some of her best work alongside her daughter, Laura Dern. Take this fantastical black comedy from David Lynch, in which she's out-of-the-box terrific as the overbearing, unhinged mother to Derrin's character. *\$4 on demand*

## Rambling Rose

With this 1991 Depression-era drama, Ladd and Dern became the first mother and daughter ever nominated for Oscars for the same film. Ladd plays the matriarch in a Southern family who takes in a damaged young woman as a domestic, leading to romantic upheavals. *\$4 on demand*

## Chinatown

While onscreen only briefly, Ladd makes an indelible impression in Roman Polanski's 1974 noir classic as a prostitute hired to impersonate Faye Dunaway's character in a visit to private eye Jake Gittes. She later delivers Gittes a crucial clue, and pays a steep price. *Paramount+*

## Enlightened

Mother and daughter teamed up again in this underrated 2011-13 dark comedy series from Mike White, which ran for a too-brief two seasons. Dern and Ladd play off each other perfectly as a woman bouncing back from a public breakdown and the mother who doubted she could. *HBO Max*

## Joy

In this 2015 David O. Russell comedy, a vibrant Ladd plays grandmother to Jennifer Lawrence's title character, a go-getter who builds a business empire. *\$4 on demand*

## The Week's guide to what's worth watching

## The Assassin

As her surprised adult son puts it, she's "some kind of perimenopausal James Bond." TV veteran Keeley Hawes stars in this sharp new British comedy thriller series as a covert assassin who's living on a Greek island when her son visits, hoping to learn who his father was. But that bit of business is put on hold when an attempt is made on Mom's life, she admits her years of deceit, and the steely Julie and her gobsmacked boy go on the run across Europe. Freddie Highmore co-stars. *Thursday, Nov. 20, AMC+*

## One Shot With Ed Sheeran

Here's a new way to take a whirlwind tour of New York City. Redheaded pop star Ed Sheeran has teamed with Philip Barantini, the director of *Adolescence*, to create a special in which Barantini applies his single-shot magic to trailing Sheeran's wanderings as he straps a guitar on his shoulder and wanders the city's streets, subways, and bars ready to unleash his hits on surprised listeners. *Friday, Nov. 21, Netflix*

## Chris Hemsworth: A Road Trip to Remember

The world knows him as Thor, but Chris Hemsworth has been carving out a strong side career as a reality-series personality. Having put out two seasons of *Limitless*, his entertaining plunge into extreme wellness, the Aussie screen star invites viewers to join a touching personal journey: a cross-country motorcycle ride with his father, Craig Hemsworth, who has been diagnosed with early-stage Alzheimer's. *Sunday, Nov. 23, at 9 p.m., National Geographic*

## Masterpiece: The Great Escaper

Adventures truly do come at any age. Michael Caine and Glenda Jackson, in career-capping screen roles, are both superb in this drama based on the true story of Bernard Jordan, an 89-year-old British World War II veteran who made headlines when he broke out of retirement care to travel to Normandy for the commemoration of D-Day's 70th anniversary. *Sunday, Nov. 23, at 9 p.m., PBS; check local listings*



Hu Ge, the Gatsby of 'Blossoms Shanghai'

## Blossoms Shanghai

In the mood for something different? A massive hit in China, *Blossoms Shanghai* is an operatic 30-episode series from legendary Hong Kong director Wong Kar Wai. In 1990s Shanghai, an economic boom creates unprecedented wealth, and among the major players are Ah Bao, a Gatsbyesque figure who becomes the talk of the town and is courted by three very different women. *Monday, Nov. 24, Criterion*

## Other highlights

## 2025 CMA Awards

Lainey Wilson will host the ceremony again and is a leading nominee alongside Ella Langley, Megan Maroney, and Zach Top. All five will be among the night's performers. *Wednesday, Nov. 19, at 8 p.m., ABC*

## The Family Plan 2

Mark Wahlberg and Michelle Monaghan return as parents juggling the demands of Dad's career as an assassin, this time while bringing the kids to London for a Christmas getaway that turns into a trans-European chase. *Friday, Nov. 21, Apple TV*

## Train Dreams

Joel Edgerton stars as an itinerant logger in the Pacific Northwest during the railroad boom in this beautiful drama, which is coming off a brief theatrical run. *Friday, Nov. 21, Netflix*

## Show of the week

## A Man on the Inside

Ted Danson and Michael Schur's fruitful collaboration continues. First came Schur's *The Good Place*, then Season 1 of this clever comedy starring Danson as a widower and retired professor who goes undercover in a retirement community as a rookie private eye. In Season 2, Danson's Charles will be returning to academia, posing as a new faculty hire to help out a college president who has received blackmail threats. Seeking suspects among his new peers, he has his heart piqued by a free-spirited music professor, played by Danson's wife, the ever-watchable Mary Steenburgen. *Thursday, Nov. 20, Netflix*



Danson: Role-playing through retirement

## Dry-brined turkey: How one tweak makes a difference

We're big advocates of dry brining the Thanksgiving turkey, and our dry brine "contains a surprise ingredient," said the editors of *Milk Street* magazine. Dry brining has some major advantages over wet brining. It's easier, produces deeper, more concentrated flavor, and doesn't leave the meat waterlogged.

At heart, dry brining is nothing more than salting the bird and giving the salt time to break down some of the proteins. But we add powdered buttermilk because the lactic acid "assists with tenderization, particularly in the meat nearest the surface." We then add a bit of sugar to offset the acidity of the powdered buttermilk.

Expect roasting time to stretch another 30 minutes if you start with a 14-pound bird instead of a 12-pounder. With or without the maple-soy glaze, the turkey will produce drippings that'll give you a start on your gravy.

### Recipe of the week Maple-and-soy-glazed dry-brined turkey

- 2 tbsp powdered buttermilk
- 2 tbsp kosher salt
- 1 tbsp white sugar
- 12-13 lb turkey, neck and giblets discarded or reserved for another use



*The simple glaze adds salty-sweet texture.*

- 1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- Ground black pepper
- 3 tbsp maple syrup
- 2 tbsp soy sauce

To prepare dry-brine mix, stir together powdered buttermilk, salt, and sugar.

To prepare turkey, set a sturdy roasting rack in a roasting pan. Using paper towels, pat turkey dry inside and out. Tuck wing tips to the back. Carefully loosen skin on breasts, thighs and drumsticks by sliding your hand between skin and meat. Distribute half the dry-brine mix evenly under skin over those parts. Evenly sprinkle remaining

dry-brine mix over exterior, rubbing it in. Set turkey breast side up on rack. Refrigerate, uncovered, for at least 12 hours or up to 24.

One hour before roasting, remove pan with turkey from refrigerator and let stand at room temperature. Heat oven to 325 with a rack in lowest position. If desired, use kitchen twine to tie ends of drumsticks together.

When turkey has stood at room temperature for 1 hour, add 2 cups water to roasting pan. Brush oil onto surface of turkey. Sprinkle lightly with pepper. Roast for 1½ hours. Meanwhile, in a small bowl, stir together maple syrup and soy sauce.

Remove turkey from oven and brush top and sides with half the maple-soy mixture. Roast for another 30 minutes. Remove from oven again and brush with remaining glaze. Roast until thickest part of breast reaches 165 degrees and thighs reach 175 to 180, about another 30 minutes for a 12-pound bird.

Remove from oven, then tip juices out of cavity, letting them run into pan. Transfer turkey to a platter and let rest at least 30 minutes. When ready to serve, transfer to a cutting board. Remove and discard twine, if used. Carve turkey and arrange on platter. Serves 12.

### Madison, Wis.: A college town's dining scene levels up

"Once a sleepy college town," Wisconsin's capital has been transformed by steady growth into "a full-fledged city," said Peter Cameron in *The New York Times*. Sure, the locals' love of beer and cheese in heavy doses is "still going strong," as is their passion for University of Wisconsin Badgers football. But Madison is still picturesque, with lakes to both the north and south squeezing its center to a narrow isthmus, and its 270,000 or so residents now support "an impressive lineup of restaurants and bars."

#### Tornado Club Steak House

At a Wisconsin supper club, cocktails, cold relish trays, comfort food, and Northwoods decor are de rigueur, and the Tornado Club does the retro tradition well, with circular booths, stained-glass lamps, and a terrific French onion soup and filet au poivre. Also, "dinner club" doesn't mean you're not invited. 116 S. Hamilton St.

**The Old Fashioned** Also on Capitol Square, this is a less spendy but equally fun supper club option. "Try the classic fish fry—a meatless Friday standard across Wisconsin," and don't forget a brandy old-fashioned, "the classic Wisconsin supper club drink." 23 N. Pinckney St.



*Supper hour at the Tornado Club*

**Mint Mark** Reservations are accepted 30 days out for this more upscale local favorite. A great cocktail program accompanies a menu that draws on Wisconsin's bounty in plates such as Kolbasz sausage with a sunchoke and potato pancake and tender roast beef with Yorkshire pudding.

1874 E. Washington Ave.

**Sardine** This is lakeside dining at its best. Co-owner chefs John Gadau and Phillip Hurley oversee a formidable bistro menu with dishes such as wood-grilled swordfish and the chicken paillard. At breakfast time, "try the crab, bacon lardon, and shrimp cakes." 617 Williamson St.

### Bourbon: Beyond Kentucky

While Kentucky makes 95% of the world's bourbon, "that still leaves quite a few barrels in need of sampling from the other 49 states," said Wayne Curtis in *Garden & Gun*. Bourbon, a name that can only be used for a U.S.-made whiskey, is produced in most states, and the standouts offer "a rainbow of taste profiles," as these three suggest.

#### Wiggly Bridge Bottled in Bond (\$70).

This rye-heavy bourbon from York, Maine, "seems to capture the state's rugged maritime character." You get "waves of black pepper spice" that "dance with golden honey," plus touches of clove and cracked leather.

#### TX Straight Bourbon Port Finish (\$80).

Distilled in Fort Worth, Texas, this "raucous" bourbon delivers notes of dark chocolate, cracked pepper, and charred oak.

#### High West Bottled in Bond (\$80).

This Utah bourbon opens with "a pleasingly soft creamed corn taste" while "tightly structured spicy notes give it spine."



## This week's dream: Teddy Roosevelt's Badlands

Our Theodore Roosevelt-themed road trip “started out just the way Teddy would have wanted it: terribly,” said **Sam Graham-Felsen** in *The New York Times*. I had decided that my 8-year-old son, Saul, could use an adventure that’d help him rebound from adversity, but I hadn’t anticipated that during our drive to Theodore Roosevelt National Park in North Dakota, my boy would drench us both with gasoline when I suggested he fill our tank. I’d imagined we would be watching dawn’s light “slowly paint the Badlands gold,” but instead we spent the morning in a laundromat, with me trying to remember that the trip was intended to teach resilience. Saul is so obsessed with Roosevelt and our national parks that he wears a Junior Ranger vest everywhere he goes. I was hoping the land where TR transformed himself into an avatar of “the strenuous life” could work its magic on Saul.

The park itself is “freakishly beautiful.” We drove for an hour among its



Sunrise in Theodore Roosevelt National Park

“mushroom-like hoodoos” and red and gold buttes—ancient terrain that makes you “instantly aware of your puny notch in the cosmic timeline.” It was late when we started a hike, though, and Saul was spent after 10 minutes. The next day went better. Together, we climbed one butte after another, ascending higher amid what felt “like the world’s biggest, coolest playground.” Saul proclaimed the park a

miracle, and he seemed “resilient, rugged, ready for more”—unlike I’d ever seen him.

During the next five days, we visited six more national park sites, including Mount Rushmore. The hint of pince-nez glasses on Roosevelt’s 60-foot face reminded me that young Teddy was a skinny nerd mocked as “Four Eyes.” At 25, he came to this region to work as a cattleman, and at a bar one night, a drunk brandishing two guns demanded that “Four Eyes” buy everyone a round. Instead, Teddy socked him in the face.

I read to Saul from a Roosevelt biography each night, and TR’s machismo caused Saul to begin souring on him. Meanwhile, he became enamored of Pee-wee Herman after his first-ever viewing of *Pee-wee’s Big Adventure*, which was fine with me. Pee-wee was a wimp, but he was a wimp who charmed biker gangs with his joy and confidence. That’s what I really wanted for Saul, “to become a man on his own terms.”

### Hotel of the week



The island from above

#### Royal Davui Island Resort Beqa Lagoon, Fiji

A stay at this 16-villa resort is “the next best thing to having your own private island,” said Elizabeth Brownfield in *Forbes*. There are never more than 32 guests at the adults-only retreat, which occupies a small island amid the diver-friendly clear waters of Beqa Lagoon, and you’ll see no other thatched-roof villa from which-ever one you choose. Each villa is perched on a cliff and has a sun-deck and plunge pool surrounded by “lush jungle foliage.” The all-inclusive fee provides access to a fitness center, Hobie Cat sailing, and meals served at your villa or at an open-air restaurant “tucked under a majestic 400-year-old Pacific banyan tree.” [royaldavui.com](http://royaldavui.com); three-night stays for two from \$4,776

### Getting the flavor of...

#### A night dive on the Great Barrier Reef

“There’s still hope for the world’s largest reef system,” said Jessica Vincent in *National Geographic Traveller* (U.K.). Though the Great Barrier Reef is struggling to cope with rising ocean temperatures, remote stretches of the 1,500-mile-long reef are in robust health, and visiting them can help the entire ecosystem. I recently joined a three-night expedition on the 24-passenger *Spirit of Freedom*, which carried us from the Queensland, Australia, coast to Lizard Island, home to a reef research station. I was assured by the crew that divers who visit the reef with an accredited operator are beneficial because they increase funding and help gather data. The waters near Lizard Island teemed with life, revealing why the island is David Attenborough’s favorite place on Earth. Even more unforgettable was diving in inky darkness a night earlier. It’s an experience that stays with me: As I swing my flashlight before me, “red, white, and amber eyes blink back,” some belonging to sharks, some to moray eels. Meanwhile, “fish in the hundreds dart past my face, close enough to feel the chill of their scales on my skin.”

#### Sardinia’s sacred ‘fairy houses’

“In Sardinia, history, legend, and daily life remain inseparable,” said Andrea Cocco in *BBC.com*. I recently immersed myself in that rich brew when I toured some of the 17 neolithic stone necropolises that were collectively designated a UNESCO World Heritage site

this year. The Mediterranean island is home to 3,500 such underground structures, known to locals as “fairy houses,” or *domus de janas*. “In Sardinian folklore, these chambers are believed to be the enchanted homes of benevolent fairy-like women called janas”—beings said to have taught humans how to bake bread. In truth, they are tombs that were carved into stone between 3200 and 2800 B.C. by the Ozieri, an advanced people who believed death began a new chapter. My guide told me that the Ozieri saw the earth as a womb, “a place that welcomes and transforms.”

#### Tips on travel inoculations

When you book your next distant overseas vacation, “don’t forget to inform your family doctor,” said Andrea Sachs in *The Washington Post*. Visiting some countries can require an array of inoculations, and “the expense can really balloon.” A traveler to India could pay up to \$4,000 for immunizations against typhoid, Japanese encephalitis, hepatitis A, chikungunya, cholera, and malaria, depending on insurance coverage and which medical recommendations are heeded. Start by consulting your primary doctor, who may have travel medicine experience. But you’re likely to be directed to a specialized travel clinic, which will typically charge a minor consultation fee plus a fee for each shot. Some for-profit clinics charge hefty markups for vaccines compared with a clinic tied to a university hospital. Online resources can help, including the Centers for Disease Control’s “Yellow Book.”



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# Best Properties on the Market

## This week: Homes for entertaining



**1** ◀ **Edwards, Colo.** Built in 2000 on a hill in central Colorado, this seven-bedroom mountain home about 30 minutes west of Vail has a floor-to-ceiling rock fireplace and a sit-down wet bar in the living room. A theater, a billiards table, and a wine cellar with a tasting room are on a lower level. The 2-acre lot includes balconies with Gore Range views, a hot tub, a covered patio, and a yard. \$5,995,000. Brooke Horan-Kates, Slifer Smith & Frampton Real Estate/Luxury Portfolio International, (970) 376-5149



**2** ▶ **Palm Springs, Calif.** Architect John Walling designed this 1975 one-story home with glam modern interiors, indoor-outdoor dining and lounge areas, and a sunken wet bar. The three-bedroom also features floor-to-ceiling glass walls with mountain views, a gas fireplace, and a renovated kitchen with a double oven. The corner lot includes a pool and spa, a pass-through window to the covered patio, a firepit, and space for alfresco dining. \$2,837,430. Marc Lange, Equity Union Real Estate, (760) 834-5484



**3** ◀ **Shorewood, Minn.** In a Twin Cities suburb 25 minutes from Minneapolis, this six-bedroom 1964 mid-century modern home, updated in 2019, features an open-plan great room with a dining area that opens to a screened porch and a terrace. The organic-modern kitchen includes a granite island, knotty white-oak cabinets, a walk-in pantry, and a built-in banquette. A new pool and kitchen cabana fill out the 2-acre lot. \$2,995,000. Gary Petersen, Coldwell Banker Realty, (952) 451-0284

# Best Properties on the Market

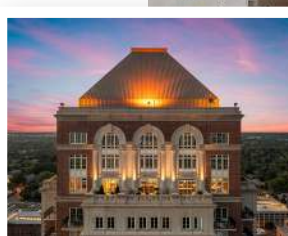
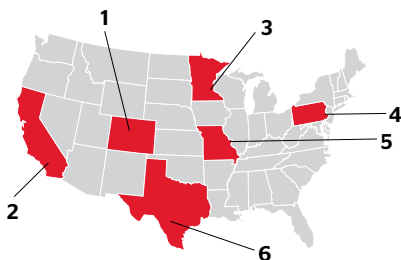
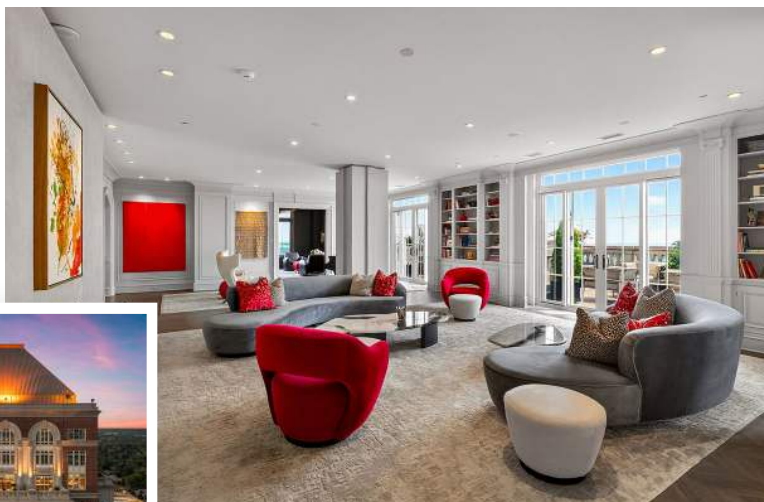


Juan Vidal



**4 ◀ New Hope, Pa.** The Glass Barn, a 1987 modernist five-bedroom revamped in 2020, features a great room with heated concrete floors, a concrete fireplace, and a paned gable wall. It connects to a seating area, a kitchen with soapstone counters, and a wine room. Entertaining continues in the 6-plus-acre lot's heated greenhouse with two fireplaces and dining space. Outside are a pool and spa, a tennis and pickleball court, and a 2-acre wildflower field. \$6,250,000. Chris Preston, Kurfiss Sotheby's International Realty, (215) 262-9609

**5 ▶ Clayton, Mo.** This full-floor, penthouse apartment near St. Louis has multiple terraces, a high-end chef's kitchen with a butler's pantry, a black lacquered bar, and a 500-bottle wine room. The 2003 three-bedroom features walnut and ebony chevron floors, a Venetian-plastered living room with French doors, and a windowed dining room with city and treetop views. Building amenities include 24-hour door staff, a gym, a dog park, and a pool. \$7,495,000. Alex Thornhill, Janet McAfee Real Estate/Luxury Portfolio International, (314) 983-2130



## Steal of the week



**6 ◀ San Antonio** In a former office and warehouse built in 1913 for the Peden Iron & Steel Co., this two-story, open-plan condo in the Southtown corridor has an eat-in kitchen, a deck, and shared pool and barbecue areas. The 2015 two-bedroom has original concrete floors and posts, vaulted ceilings with

exposed ducts, a kitchen with granite counters, and a primary suite with a sitting zone. The River Walk, the Alamo, shops, and dining are all a short drive away. \$535,000. Shail Patel, Kuper Sotheby's International Realty, (210) 454-2904

## The News at a Glance

## The bottom line

■ OpenAI expects to lose \$9 billion this year on sales of \$13 billion, and that losses will continue to mount through 2028, when the company estimates its cash burn will hit a staggering \$74 billion. Competitor Anthropic, anticipates losses of \$3 billion on \$4.2 billion in sales this year. *The Wall Street Journal*

■ Pfizer clinched a \$10 billion deal to buy obesity drug developer Metsera, capping a bidding war with Danish rival Novo Nordisk. The U.S. favored a Pfizer deal in the hot category, warning Metsera that U.S. regulators might not approve a Novo deal. *Bloomberg*



■ The National Retail Federation said U.S. holiday spending is set to top \$1 trillion for the first time this year, forecasting a 3.7% to 4.2% increase from 2024. Consumers plan to spend an average of \$890.49 per person on holiday gifts, food, and decor. *Axios*

■ California is home to the most expensive cheeseburger meals in the continental U.S., per new DoorDash data. A combo meal with a cheeseburger, fries, and a soda will run you an average of \$25.20 in Chula Vista and \$22.94 in Anaheim. If you're looking for a cheaper cheeseburger, place your order in Lincoln, Neb. (\$10.75); Milwaukee (\$11.36); or Detroit (\$12.90). *Axios*

■ The number of students graduating with Coast Guard qualifications to work on vessels has been falling, to 810 last year from 1,048 in 2017. To attract workers, the Military Sealift Command, a fleet of ships that supplies the U.S. Navy, has been offering first officers a salary of \$220,000 plus a \$71,000 signing bonus. *The New York Times*

## Deals: SoftBank swaps Nvidia for OpenAI

SoftBank is on a hunt for more cash to keep plowing into AI bets, said April Roach and Dylan Butts in *CNBC.com*.

The Japanese investment giant stunned investors this week by revealing that it had cashed out its entire \$5.83 billion stake in Nvidia, and part of its stake in T-Mobile for another \$9.17 billion. That money “will be used to fund” a \$22.5 billion investment that SoftBank already pledged to OpenAI as the Japanese firm continues “aggressively pushing into artificial intelligence.” With Wall Street on edge over suspicions of an “AI bubble,” SoftBank insisted the move “had nothing to do with concerns” about Nvidia’s business. The sale represents a small consolation for SoftBank chief executive Masayoshi



Son and OpenAI's Sam Altman

Son, who regretted selling the firm’s 5% stake in Nvidia in 2019, right before the chipmaker’s valuation soared.

The AI “money-go-round” spins on, said John Foley in the *Financial Times*. While “the optics are not great” for Nvidia, which drops a prominent shareholder, what it “loses on one hand it may gain with another.”

One way of thinking about this maneuver is that SoftBank pulled money from Nvidia to funnel into OpenAI, which relies on Nvidia’s chips. In that sense, Nvidia “should be happy” to see SoftBank furthering its AI bets. Investors, however, may grow suspicious about the “magical math of AI,” by which everyone seems to benefit without any downside.

## Reversals: Ford may nix electric F-150

Ford is considering scrapping the electric version of its F-150 pickup after four years, said Sharon Terlep in *The Wall Street Journal*. The automaker touted the F-150 Lightning as “a modern Model T,” but it has lost billions trying to convince customers to switch from gas-powered trucks. Sales are “expected to plummet in the absence” of the federal EV tax credit, and Ford “already paused production of the truck last month amid an aluminum shortage.” The company may keep the electric F-150 plant idle “as it shifts to smaller, more affordable EVs.”

## Legends: Buffett writes final shareholder letter

Warren Buffett is “going quiet,” said Jordan Valinsky in *CNN.com*. The 95-year-old Oracle of Omaha wrote his final annual shareholder letter this week as chief executive of Berkshire Hathaway, ending an era for investors, many of whom have treated his words over the years as gospel. Buffett will remain the company’s chairman. With plans to give away almost all his \$149 billion fortune, Buffett will concentrate on philanthropy. However, he said he plans to keep a “significant amount” of Berkshire’s Class A stock until shareholders grow comfortable with his successor, Greg Abel.

## Boeing: Criminal charges over crashes dropped by DOJ

A federal judge last week granted the Justice Department’s request to drop criminal charges against Boeing, said Dave Michaels in *The Wall Street Journal*. The aerospace company “agreed in July 2024 to plead guilty rather than face trial” for allegedly deceiving air safety regulators before two crashes that killed 346 people. When the Trump administration took over, however, Boeing reversed its decision, and the DOJ pushed for a nonprosecution agreement that would require Boeing to pay more compensation. Some families of victims have “said they think Boeing bought its way out of trouble.”

## Bonus round: Trump renews call for ‘tariff dividend’

President Trump this week called for a \$2,000 “tariff dividend,” reviving an idea he floated earlier this year, said Jason Lalljee in *Axios*. Trump said on Truth Social that he wanted checks mailed to “everyone (not including high income people!)” out of the revenue from steep import taxes. “The government generated \$195 billion in tariff-related revenue in fiscal 2025”—but a \$2,000 payment to all Americans earning \$100,000 or less would cost about \$300 billion. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent suggested Trump’s tariff payout “could simply refer to tax savings” from the recent Republican-led tax bill.

## A rude awakening at an Airbnb rival

The collapse of Airbnb competitor Sonder this week was so sudden that it stranded guests mid-stay, said Jordan Valinsky in *CNN.com*. Patrick M. D’Aoust missed the complimentary breakfast and was told he had to end an anniversary trip early when he was given “just 15 minutes to vacate his room” at a Sonder property in Montreal. D’Aoust, who tried and failed to negotiate staying until an 11 a.m. checkout time, was “one of many travelers effected by Sonder’s shutdown following the sudden end of a deal with Marriott, which had let guests book and earn loyalty points at Sonder’s 9,000 furnished apartments and boutique hotel rooms.” Marriott said that a 20-year licensing deal signed in 2024 was terminated 19 years early on Nov. 9 because Sonder defaulted. Once considered “a major Airbnb rival,” Sonder peaked with a \$1 billion valuation in 2019 before the pandemic decimated its business. Complaints lit up social media from travelers who were told to leave without compensation.

# Making Money

## Real estate: Where did all the young homebuyers go?

“First-time homebuyers are older than ever,” said James Rodriguez in *Business Insider*. New data from the National Association of Realtors shows that over the past year, “the typical age of a first-time buyer reached a record high of 40,” up from 33 just four years ago. Housing market “churn” typically should free up entry-level homes, as middle-aged owners upgrade to larger houses and seniors downsize. “But that sort of healthy movement has ground to a halt” in recent years. “The double whammy” of sky-high borrowing rates and soaring prices has made a traditional starter home increasingly unaffordable, forcing younger buyers to delay their purchase “until they can afford to buy a place that feels less like a stepping stone.” The result: “Welcome to the age of the geriatric homebuyer.”

“That’s not a great omen for the American dream,” said Sydney Lake in *Fortune*. Work hard, buy a home, then see your family’s wealth grow as your property gains value. That ideal can seem unattainable for Gen Z and Millennials, many of whom can’t buy without support from the Bank of Mom and Dad. “Americans need to make about \$141,000 to afford a median-priced home, according to a National Association of Home Builders report, but the average salary for a person in the U.S. is about half of that.” With homeownership out of reach, people have



Homebuyers in their 20s or 30s are a rare sight.

shifted their view on renting, said Leslie Cook in *Money*. A recent survey found that more than two-thirds of Gen Z renters believe it makes more financial sense than owning, and 83% of them said “renting provides them the opportunity to save money for life experiences.” The question for many has “stopped being *When will I buy a home?* and turned into *Do I have to buy a home?*”

“What is a savvy builder to do?” asked Conor Sen in *Bloomberg*. “Migrate toward the higher end of the market, of course.” Developers “can make homes smaller, with cheaper appliances and finishes, but the price per unit of lumber and labor is the same whether you’re building a \$300,000 home or a million-dollar home,” and the payoff is much greater on the latter. Eventually, demand for the new luxury homes should lead to “more 20- and 30-year-old starter homes being vacated,” but it will take some time. The housing divide is symptomatic of a “split-screen economy,” said Jeanne Whalen in *The Wall Street Journal*, one “that’s delivering robust returns for high earners and many older Americans” while their adult kids struggle to afford rent, child care, and health care. Of course, “there have always been divisions between high-earning Americans and others, such as younger or low-income workers.” But what’s different now is that those divisions are “widening within the same families.”

## What the experts say

### ■ Card giants settle swipe-fee lawsuit

Good news for small businesses, said AnnaMaria Andriotis in *The Wall Street Journal*. Visa and Mastercard reached an agreement this week to settle a 2005 lawsuit to reduce their so-called swipe fees, and it gives stores more power over which cards they choose to accept. Under the terms of the deal, the two largest networks will lower the fees they charge merchants, “which are often between 2% and 2.5%, by an average of around 0.1 percentage point over several years.”

While it might not sound like much, Visa and Mastercard “collected \$72 billion of these interchange fees” in 2023, so the numbers add up. Consumers could now “see big changes at the register.” Merchants that accept one kind of Visa card would no longer “have to accept all Visa credit cards.” First to go could be rewards cards, “which charge businesses higher fees.”

### ■ Trump touts a 50-year mortgage

FDR championed the 30-year fixed-rate mortgage as part of the New Deal. Now the Trump administration wants to go a step further “amid soaring prices and mounting affordability concerns,” said Nick Lichtenberg in *Fortune*. Last week, the administration proposed a 50-year fixed-rate mortgage, which would

lower monthly payments by extending the standard amortization period. “For instance, Fannie Mae’s calculator estimates that for a \$400,000 home at a 6.575% interest rate with 20% down, the monthly principal and interest would be \$2,788 on a 30-year fixed, \$2,640 for 40 years, and \$2,572 for 50 years.” But critics warn that extending mortgages to 50 years “would increase total interest paid and slow the buildup of home equity, potentially trapping borrowers in debt for a lifetime.”

### ■ Dubious ratings for risky loans

Rating agencies are back “in the line of fire,” said Lee Harris in the *Financial Times*. Ahead of the 2008 financial crisis, bond rating agencies like Moody’s and S&P “gave out inflated stamps of approval to risky assets,” especially subprime credit. Today, “second-tier shops” are taking heat, mainly for their role in the booming private credit market for corporate loans. Big private capital firms “have turned to the smaller agencies as they seek a faster, more flexible service to suit their complex needs.” One of them is Egan-Jones, which is under scrutiny from regulators for churning out ratings at an astonishing rate; last year, 20 or so analysts issued 3,600 ratings. Industry grants produce about 1,000 annually.

## Charity of the week

Thousands of wolf dogs are born across the U.S. every year. For-profit breeders often misrepresent these exotic pets—intentionally interbred from other canines with partial wolf DNA—to new pet owners, who end up unable to manage their wild instincts. By the time they turn 3 years old, more than 65% of wolf dogs are moved to shelters, where many are euthanized. Since 2013, the Tennessee nonprofit **Wolf PAWS** ([wolfpaws.org](http://wolfpaws.org)) has provided an outdoor permanent sanctuary for abused and abandoned wolf dogs. Although it generally discourages ownership, the sanctuary hosts tours to educate the public, introducing visitors to its 11 resident wolf dogs, who roam half-acre enclosures and participate in enrichment activities. Each wolf dog is available for sponsorship, and their online profiles feature their rescue stories, personalities, and photos.



Each charity we feature has earned a four-star overall rating from Charity Navigator, which rates not-for-profit organizations on the strength of their finances, their governance practices, and the transparency of their operations. Four stars is the group’s highest rating.

## Future shock: Tesla's trillion-dollar man

Elon Musk is already the world's richest man. His new pay package would take him up into the stratosphere, said **Becky Peterson** in *The Wall Street Journal*. Tesla shareholders last week voted overwhelmingly to award Musk a compensation plan "that could ultimately give him new stock worth \$1 trillion and a roughly 25% stake" in the company. To unlock the full allotment, Musk would need to steer Tesla past a successive series of milestones, each more fanciful than the last, including selling 20 million cars, 10 million self-driving-software subscriptions, 1 million robotaxis, and 1 million Optimus humanoid robots. Tesla, which "currently has a market cap of around \$1.5 trillion," would also need to more than quintuple its value to \$8.5 trillion and sustain \$400 billion a year in adjusted profit, about 25 times what it earns today. It's all supposed to be a "high-octane incentive for outstanding performance"—plus insurance, Musk says, that he won't leave and have his "robot army" fall into the wrong hands. The targets seem inconceivable, although skeptics said the same thing about Musk's \$56 billion pay package in 2018.



Musk: Huge promises—with a huge payoff

Yes, a trillion dollars can sound excessive or even "icky," said *The Washington Post* in an editorial. But if Musk can reach his goals, he'll "deserve compensation the likes of which the world has never seen." Tesla "makes a lot of physical stuff: cars, trucks, robots, and batteries." If he succeeds, Musk will not only have created unprecedented shareholder wealth, he also will "have employed many thousands of Americans with good jobs and created new technologies for others to improve and

refine." That's plenty of reason "to root for his success, even if you don't like him personally."

This is a staggering "display of corporate capture," said *The Economist*. Musk already owns 15% of Tesla's shares, and thanks to the lax corporate-governance rules of Texas—Tesla's legal home "since the carmaker stormed out of Delaware after a judge voided Musk's earlier payday"—Musk is allowed "to vote for his own pay raise." His "pliant" board fanned fears that Musk "might leave if he didn't get what he wanted," knowing the

retail investors who own about 35% of Tesla's remaining stock "regard Musk as a technological messiah." Those investors don't care that Musk's vision doesn't feature any "plan to turn around Tesla's declining car sales," said **Andrew J. Hawkins** in *The Verge*. Nor does it address the quantifiable "damage that Musk himself has done to Tesla's brand."

While Musk dances onstage with his robots, said **Rebecca F. Elliott** in *The New York Times*, many Americans are "struggling to afford basics like food, housing, and child care." The median worker at one of Tesla's factories earned around \$57,000 in 2024. Even Pope Leo XIV weighed in, saying that Musk's compensation "was a symptom of the growing disparity between working people and the wealthy." That disparity is beginning to ripple into politics. It's only a coincidence that Musk's pay package won approval the same week that New York City, the home of Wall Street, elected a democratic socialist, Zohran Mamdani, as mayor. But it may be a sign of things to come.

## Home Depot gets caught up in ICE's war

**Beth Kowitz**  
*Bloomberg*

A backlash is coming for Home Depot, said **Beth Kowitz**. "No company in the United States has become more closely associated with Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids" than the home improvement retailer. Masked ICE agents camp out in Home Depot parking lots ready to "chase and tackle and detain the day laborers who gather there to look for work." The raids are so upsetting that employees who witness the scenes "are allowed to go home for the day with pay." Yet, so far, Home Depot has "offered the same answer after each episode," saying that it "wasn't notified" and isn't involved. That's not going to fly. Already

"customers have started to question whether the company's silence makes it an accomplice to the sweeps rather than merely the backdrop." This chorus will continue to grow louder if Home Depot doesn't take some proactive steps to defend its turf. "This doesn't have to be a moral case." Contractors, homebuilders, and renovators "now make up half its business," in part because they go to Home Depot to pick up "not only supplies but also the workers" to use them. In Chicago, however, sales at some locations are down 20%. It's hard not to see the connection to ICE raids in the city. Unless, like Home Depot, you choose to ignore reality.

## Empty words for Rust Belt workers

**Billy Witz**  
*The New York Times*

A new Ohio senator learned a hard lesson about the challenge of a Rust Belt revival, said **Billy Witz**. Republican politicians flocked to Chillicothe, Ohio, in April, when the local paper mill's owner, a private-equity firm called H.I.G. Capital, "announced it was closing the plant in 60 days." Sen. Bernie Moreno, a fresh-faced MAGA standard bearer, responded "with a fire-breathing letter" hitting on a populist theme: "Regular folks are losing out—in this case, to rich guys in Miami." After threatening a federal investigation, Moreno told 850 cheering workers that H.I.G. had agreed to keep the facility "open until the end of the year,"

enough time to find a new owner. The senator then personally summoned "some of the biggest names in the paper industry" to make an offer. All of them passed. The mill needed hundreds of millions of dollars to modernize. H.I.G. "couldn't even give it away." Moreno had to return to Chillicothe and inform workers that the plant would close in August, well before the end of the year, after all. In October, H.I.G. did manage to find a new owner for the shuttered mill: a subsidiary of the U.S. Medical Glove Co. If things go well, then "in time, the company might employ 1,500 people," but as of last week, it had hired just 70.

## The vice president who led the War on Terror

**Dick Cheney**  
1941-2025

Dick Cheney turned the vice presidency from a punch line into a powerhouse. Having been a right-hand man to multiple Republican presidents before running with George W. Bush in 2000, he knew his worth. When a former veep, Dan Quayle, warned him the job mostly involved attending openings and funerals, Cheney replied, “I have a different understanding with the president.” A proponent of a strong executive branch, he rejected the idea that protecting civil liberties outweighed the imperative to prevent another 9/11. Instead, he became the architect of the War on Terror, crafting and promoting the administration’s rationale for invading Iraq in 2003. That conflict, in which nearly 5,000 U.S. service members and some 200,000 Iraqi civilians were killed, grew increasingly unpopular once it became clear that Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein did not have weapons of mass destruction. Cheney, though, professed no regrets—and didn’t even object to being portrayed as a behind-the-scenes Machiavelli. “Am I the evil genius in the corner that nobody ever sees come out of his hole?” he mused in 2004. “It’s a nice way to operate, actually.”



Richard Bruce Cheney was born in Lincoln, Neb., and spent his adolescence in Casper, Wyo. His parents, both Democrats, “boasted that their son had been born on Franklin Roosevelt’s birthday,” said *USA Today*. In high school, Dick was captain of the football team—his future wife, Lynne Ann Vincent, was homecoming queen—and won a scholarship to Yale University. But he dropped out and “floundered for a time,” racking up two drunk-driving arrests before starting political science classes at the University of Wyoming in the mid-1960s. By the end of the decade, he was working for “an up-and-coming staffer in the Nixon White House named Donald Rumsfeld,” who would become his mentor. In the Ford administration, 34-year-old Cheney was named the youngest chief of staff in history when Rumsfeld left the post. He had his first heart attack (he’d have five) at 37 while running for the U.S. House, where he spent 10 years. When President George H.W. Bush nominated him for secretary of defense, he was unanimously confirmed despite questions over his multiple draft deferrals. “I had other priorities in the ’60s than military service,” he said.

Cheney “won plaudits for low-key but firm leadership,” said *The Wall Street Journal*, a style that helped him form an international coalition to oust Iraqi troops from Kuwait in the first Gulf War. When the next President Bush wanted a seasoned Washington insider on his ticket, he asked Cheney to compile a list of VP candidates; Cheney did, but then selected himself. Cheney’s “defining moment” arrived on Sept. 11, 2001, said *The New York Times*. The planes hit when Bush was away in Florida. Cheney quickly ordered that any other hijacked plane be shot down—which proved unnecessary—and persuaded Bush to authorize “enhanced interrogation,” or torture, of terrorist suspects, including waterboarding, sleep deprivation, and rectal force-feeding. A “powerful advocate” for the invasions of Afghanistan in October 2001 and Iraq in March 2003, he insisted there was “no doubt” Saddam was stockpiling WMDs and that U.S. troops would be “greeted as liberators.”

“Events would prove Cheney wrong,” said *The Washington Post*. The Iraq conflict birthed insurgencies and extremism, and photographs of detainees tortured at Abu Ghraib prison drew global condemnation. By Bush’s second term, Cheney found himself increasingly sidelined. His nadir came in 2006, when he accidentally blasted a hunting buddy in the face with birdshot. Yet though the U.S. “was poorer, weaker, more divided, and less globally popular” when he left office in 2009, said *Foreign Policy*, “it also had not suffered another 9/11-like attack.”

Out of office, Cheney was “one of the most strident GOP critics of President Barack Obama,” whom he saw as weak, said *CNN.com*. Though Cheney endorsed Donald Trump as GOP presidential nominee in 2016, he broke with Trump after the Jan. 6, 2021, U.S. Capitol riot. After his daughter, then-Rep. Liz Cheney, helped investigate Trump’s attempt to overturn the 2020 election, Trump pushed supporters to oust her and fantasized about her facing a firing squad. Cheney stood with his daughter and “in an ironic coda” voted for Democrat Kamala Harris in 2024. “There has never been an individual who is a greater threat to our republic than Donald Trump,” he said. “He can never be trusted with power again.”

## The Oscar nominee who acted with her daughter

**Diane Ladd**  
1935-2025

Diane Ladd always spoke her mind, whether lambasting Hollywood greed or spouting New Age beliefs about psychic healing and reincarnation. An entrancing presence onscreen, she garnered Oscar nominations for 1974’s *Alice Doesn’t Live Here Anymore*, 1990’s *Wild at Heart*, and 1991’s *Rambling Rose*. That final nod marked the first time a mother and daughter were nominated for the same film—she for best supporting actress and her daughter, Laura Dern, for best actress. Yet while her varied work earned her respect, it never brought her movie-star status, and she complained of being asked to play mothers of actors her own age. But she didn’t mind being considered a bit wacky in her personal life. “I like to joke that when Shirley MacLaine was out on a limb, I was already out on a branch,” she said.



Moving to New Orleans to pursue theater at 16, she soon landed in New York City, where she danced at the Copacabana club before scoring television roles in the late 1950s. “Everything changed when she was cast in a 1959 off-Broadway production of Williams’ *Orpheus Descending*,” said *The Guardian*. She met her first husband, actor Bruce Dern, in that play and quickly got roles in movies, such as 1966’s *The Wild Angels*. But she considered theater her first love and twice appeared on Broadway.

Across dozens of films, Ladd “shaped her air of eccentricity and steely determination into wildly different characters,” said *The New York Times*. She loved working with her daughter, playing Laura’s onscreen mother five times and directing her in 1996’s *Mrs. Mumck*. Ladd was also a public speaker, promoting her wellness and spiritual philosophies and publishing multiple books. Continuing to act into her 80s, she kept her forthright manner intact. “Nothing’s going to be handed to you” in show business, she said in 2016. “You have to fight like a dirty rotten dog.”

Born in Meridian, Miss., Ladd grew up steeped in the stories of the South, with Tennessee Williams as a third cousin. She considered herself “an intuitive and psychic child,” said *The Washington Post*.

# The dawn of the stupid age

Technology companies persuaded us that we can outsource our thinking, said **Sophie McBain** in **The Guardian**. The cognitive skills we're losing may be impossible to get back.

**A**ROUND TWO YEARS ago, Nataliya Kosmyna, a research scientist at MIT's Media Lab, began receiving out-of-the-blue emails from strangers who reported that they had started using large language models such as ChatGPT and felt their brain had changed as a result. Their memories didn't seem as good—was that even possible, they asked her? Kosmyna herself had been struck by how quickly people had already begun to rely on generative AI. She noticed colleagues using ChatGPT at work, and the applications she received from researchers hoping to join her team started to look different. Their emails were longer and more formal, and sometimes, when she interviewed candidates on Zoom, she noticed they kept pausing before responding and looking off to the side—were they getting AI to help them? she wondered, shocked. And if they were using AI, how much did they even understand of the answers they were giving?

With some MIT colleagues, Kosmyna set up an experiment that used an electroencephalogram to monitor people's brain activity while they wrote essays with no digital assistance, with the help of an internet search engine, or with help from ChatGPT. She found that the more external help participants had, the lower their level of brain connectivity, so those who used ChatGPT to write showed significantly less activity in the brain networks associated with cognitive processing, attention, and creativity.

In other words, whatever the people using ChatGPT felt was going on inside their brains, the scans showed there wasn't much happening up there. The study's participants, who were all enrolled at MIT or nearby universities, were asked, right after they had handed in their work, if they could recall what they had written. "Barely anyone in the ChatGPT group could give a quote," Kosmyna says. "That was concerning, because you just wrote it and you do not remember anything."

Kosmyna is 35, trendily dressed, and she speaks faster than most people can think. As she observes, writing an essay requires skills that are important in our wider lives:



*AI users recalled little of what they wrote with ChatGPT's assistance.*

the ability to synthesize information, consider competing perspectives, and construct an argument. You use these skills in everyday conversations. "How are you going to deal with that? Are you going to be, like, 'Err...can I just check my phone?'" she says.

The experiment was small (54 participants) and has not yet been peer reviewed. In June, however, Kosmyna posted it online, thinking other researchers might find it interesting, and then she went about her day, unaware that she had just created an international media frenzy. Alongside the journalist requests, she received more than 4,000 emails from around the world, many from stressed-out teachers who feel their students aren't learning properly because they are using ChatGPT to do their homework. They worry AI is creating a generation who can produce passable work but don't have any usable knowledge or understanding of the material.

The fundamental issue, Kosmyna says, is that as soon as a technology becomes available that makes our lives easier, we're evolutionarily primed to use it. "Our brains love shortcuts; it's in our nature. But your brain needs friction to learn. It needs to have a challenge."

The promise of technology has been to create a "frictionless" user experience, to ensure that, provided we slide from app to app or screen to screen, we will meet no resistance. Technology lets you avoid phone calls, use self-checkouts, order everything from an app; to input your destination on Google maps and travel from A to B on

autopilot. Maybe you stop reading books because maintaining that kind of focus feels like friction; maybe you dream of owning a self-driving car. Is this the dawn of what the writer and education expert Daisy Christodoulou calls a "stupidogenic society," a parallel to an obesogenic society, in which it is easy to become stupid because machines can think for you?

"It's only software developers and drug dealers who call people users," Kosmyna mutters at one point, frustrated at AI companies' determination to push their products onto the public before we fully understand the psychological and cognitive costs. In the ever-expanding, frictionless online world, you are first and foremost a user: passive, dependent. In the dawning era of AI-generated misinformation and deep-fakes, how will we maintain the skepticism and intellectual independence we'll need? By the time we agree that our minds are no longer our own, that we simply cannot think clearly without tech assistance, how much of us will be left to resist?

**S**TART TELLING PEOPLE that you're worried about what intelligent machines are doing to our brains and there's a risk that, in the not-too-distant future, everyone will laugh at what a fuddy-duddy you were. Socrates worried that writing would weaken people's memories and encourage only superficial understanding: not wisdom but "the conceit of wisdom"—an argument that is strikingly similar to many critiques of AI. But writing didn't only change how we access and retain information; it changed how we think. As humans, we're very good at what experts call "cognitive offloading," namely using our physical environment to reduce our mental load, and this in turn helps us achieve more complex cognitive tasks.

The complication is, if technology is truly making us cleverer—turning us into efficient, information-processing machines—why do we spend so much time feeling dumb? Last year, "brain rot" was named Oxford University Press's word of the year, a term that captures both the specific feeling of mindlessness that descends

# The Last Word

when we spend too much time scrolling through rubbish online and the corrosive, aggressively dumb content itself, the non-sense memes and AI garble. When we hold our phones, we have, in theory, most of the world's accumulated knowledge at our fingertips, so why do we spend so much time dragging our eyeballs over dreck?

One issue is that our digital devices have not been designed to help us think more efficiently and clearly; almost everything we encounter online has been designed to capture and monetize our attention. To extend Christodoulou's metaphor, in the same way that one feature of an obese society is food deserts—whole neighborhoods in which you cannot buy a healthy meal—large parts of the internet are information deserts, in which the only available brain food is junk.

It is into this climate that generative AI arrived, with an entirely novel offer. Until recently you could only outsource remembering and some data processing to technology; now you can outsource thinking itself. Given that we spend most of our lives feeling overstimulated and frazzled, it's little wonder that so many have jumped at the chance to let a computer do more things we would have once done for ourselves—such as write work reports or emails, or plan a holiday. As we transition from the internet era to the AI era, what we're consuming is not only ever more low-value, ultra-processed information, but more information that is essentially pre-digested, delivered in a way that is designed to bypass important human functions, such as assessing, filtering, and summarizing information, or actually considering a problem rather than finessing the first solution presented to us.

**A** FEW YEARS ago, Matt Miles, a psychology teacher at a high school in Virginia, was sent on a training program on tech in schools. The teachers were shown a video in which a schoolgirl is caught checking her phone during lessons. In the video, she looks up and says, "You think I'm just on TikTok or playing games. I'm actually in a research room talking to a water researcher from Botswana for a project."

"It's laughable. You show it to the kids and they all laugh, right?" Miles says. Alarmed at the disconnect between how policymakers view tech in education and what teachers were seeing in the classroom, in 2017 Miles and his colleague Joe Clement, who teaches economics and government at the same school, published *Screen Schooled*, a book that argued that technology overuse is making kids dumber. In the years since, smartphones have been

banned from their classrooms, but students still work from their laptops. "We had one kid tell us, and I think it was pretty insightful, 'If you see me on my phone, there's a 0% chance I'm doing something productive. If you see me on my laptop, there's a 50% chance,'" Miles says.

Until the pandemic, many teachers were "rightly skeptical" about the benefits of introducing more technology into the classroom, Faith Boninger, a researcher at the University of Colorado, observes, but when lockdowns forced schools to go online, a new normal was created, and ed tech platforms such as Google Workspace for Education, Kahoot!, and Zearn became ubiquitous. With the spread of generative AI came new promises that it could revolutionize education and usher in an era of personalized student learning, while also reducing the workload for teachers. But almost all the research that has found benefits to introducing tech in classrooms is funded by the ed tech industry, and most large-scale independent research has found that screen time gets in the way of achievement. A global OECD study found, for instance, that the more students use tech in schools, the worse their results.



*Kosmyna: 'Our brains love shortcuts.'*

"There is simply no independent evidence at scale for the effectiveness of these tools.... In essence what is happening with these technologies is we're experimenting on children," says Wayne Holmes, a professor of critical studies of artificial intelligence and education at University College London. "Most sensible people would not go into a bar and meet somebody who says, 'Hey, I've got this new drug. It's really good for you'—and just use it. Generally, we expect our medicines to be rigorously tested, we expect them to be prescribed to us by professionals. But suddenly when

we're talking about ed tech, which apparently is very beneficial for children's developing brains, we don't need to do that."

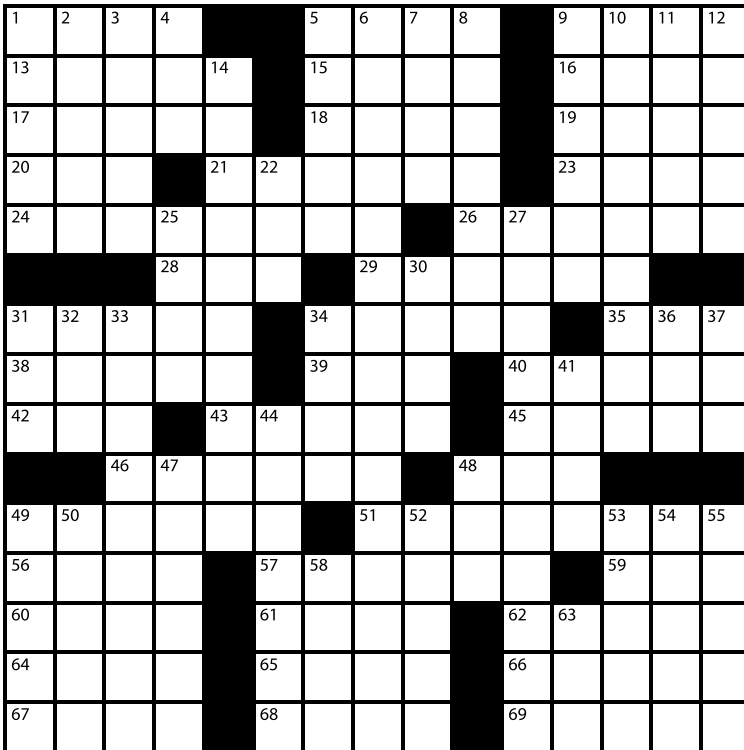
What worries Miles and Clement is not only that their students are permanently distracted by their devices but also that they will not develop critical thinking skills and deep knowledge when quick answers are only a click away. Where once Clement would ask his class a question such as "Where do you think the U.S. ranks in terms of GDP per capita?" and guide his students as they puzzled over the solution, now someone will have Googled the answer before he's even finished his question. They know students use ChatGPT constantly and get annoyed if they aren't provided with a digital copy of their assignment, because then they must type rather than copy and paste the relevant questions into an AI assistant or the Google search bar.

"Being able to Google something and providing the right answer isn't knowledge," Clement says. "And having knowledge is incredibly important so that when you hear something that's questionable or maybe fake, you think, 'Wait a minute, that contradicts all the knowledge I have that says otherwise, right?' It's no wonder there's a bunch of idiots walking about who think that the Earth is flat. Like, if you read a flat Earth blog, you think, 'Ah, that makes a lot of sense' because you don't have any understanding or knowledge." The internet is already awash with conspiracy and misinformation, something that will only become worse as AI hallucinates and produces plausible fakes, and he worries that young people are poorly equipped to navigate it.

During the pandemic, Miles says, he found his young son weeping over his school-issued tablet. His son was doing an online math program and he had been tasked with making six using the fewest number of one, three, and five tokens. He kept suggesting using two threes, and the computer kept telling him he was wrong. Miles tried one and five, which the computer accepted. "That's kind of the nightmare you get with a nonhuman AI, right?" Miles observes: Students often approach topics in unanticipated and interesting ways, but machines struggle to cope with idiosyncrasy. Listening to his story, however, I was struck by a different kind of nightmare. Maybe the dawn of the new golden era of stupidity doesn't begin when we submit to superintelligent machines; it starts when we hand over power to dumb ones.

*Adapted from an article that first appeared in The Guardian. Used with permission.*

## Crossword No. 817: Cover Stories by Matt Gaffney



**ACROSS**

- 1 Fail to be modest
- 5 Longest part of a lilac
- 9 Frosted flakes
- 13 Quotable Yogi
- 15 Beautiful Banks
- 16 Big field in Northern California
- 17 Used, as paper plates
- 18 Lena in *Havana*
- 19 Middle layer of the eye
- 20 Back talk
- 21 Count (on)
- 23 Gardener's fuel
- 24 2028, say
- 26 Squirrels squirrel them away
- 28 Be in possession of
- 29 Weather-map graphic, briefly
- 31 Bear that's not a bear
- 34 Martin in *Grace and Frankie*
- 35 "Now \_\_\_ seen everything"
- 38 Shady area
- 39 "On the other hand..."
- 40 Putting Els
- 42 Neighbor of Colo.
- 43 Sneaking suspicion
- 45 *The Sound of Music* sound
- 46 One without a maid of honor, say
- 48 Sassy Lucy
- 49 No. 1 hit for Lorde in 2013
- 51 Letters
- 56 Like good soufflé
- 57 "\_\_\_ be the day"
- 59 911 responder
- 60 Purple fruit
- 61 Wheels
- 62 Old counters

- 64 Rip in two, say
- 65 Emit light
- 66 Costing nothing, as a service
- 67 Does the math, sometimes
- 68 Take home
- 69 Medicinal amounts

**DOWN**

- 1 Shai Gilgeous-Alexander's sport, briefly
- 2 Give another shot, as a bow
- 3 Latin American corn cake
- 4 Miracle-\_\_\_
- 5 "Might \_\_\_ hole to keep the wind away": *Hamlet*
- 6 The Grammys will feature a Best Album Cover award beginning with February's ceremony; this rapper was one of the five nominated on Nov. 7, for his album *Chromakopia*
- 7 Ireland, poetically
- 8 Overwhelming political victory
- 9 Daze
- 10 This 1991 Nirvana album cover featured naked 4-month-old Spencer Elden swimming after a dollar bill
- 11 Vast amount
- 12 "\_\_\_ your problem?"
- 14 In a 2023 Top 100 list, *Billboard* named this artist's cover of a 1967 Velvet Underground album as the greatest

- album cover of all time; you could remove a banana peel to reveal the fruit beneath
- 22 Suffix with velvet
- 25 Lauren label
- 27 The cover for Cyndi Lauper's 1983 album *She's So Unusual* was shot by Annie Leibovitz as they walked through this part of New York City
- 30 Funny MacFarlane
- 31 Neighbor of Colo.
- 32 Underground score
- 33 Even decades later, a webcam catches quartets walking across this street as they re-create its namesake album's cover
- 34 Last word of a Jan. 1 song
- 36 Go toe to toe (with)
- 37 Slippery type
- 41 Lopsided win
- 44 Outshine
- 47 Some cakes have seven
- 48 Tiny, casually
- 49 One who praises Jah
- 50 Stopped a squeak
- 52 Mass. resort city
- 53 Toronto's NHL team, briefly
- 54 Game-show host, e.g.
- 55 Very messy rooms
- 58 Dance on the beach, often
- 63 End-of-October word

## The Week Contest

**This week's question:** A 77-year-old French cyclist who tumbled into a 130-foot-deep ravine on his way home from the supermarket was rescued after three days, having sustained himself on several bottles of red wine he had in his shopping bag. If this Gallic hero were to write a survival book for fellow wine lovers, what should it be titled?

**Last week's contest:** A Utah man said goodbye to the 1991 Geo Metro he's been driving for nearly 35 years by crushing the broken-down compact with a prize-winning 1,917-pound pumpkin dropped from a crane. In seven or fewer words, come up with a caption for a photo of the moment the giant gourd made impact.

THE WINNER: Someone should name a band after this *Cindy Ludwig, Senoia, Ga.*

SECOND PLACE: Pumpkins 1, Lemons 0  
*Tim Mistele, Coral Gables, Fla.*

THIRD PLACE: 'Act of Gourd' not covered by insurance  
*Daniel Hicks, Randolph, Mass.*

For runners-up and complete contest rules, please go to [theweek.com/contest](http://theweek.com/contest).

**How to enter:** Submissions should be emailed to [contest@theweek.com](mailto:contest@theweek.com). Please include your name, address, and daytime telephone number for verification; this week, type "Oenophile endurance" in the subject line.

Entries are due by noon, Eastern Time, Tuesday, Nov. 18. Winners will appear on the Puzzle Page next issue and at [theweek.com/contest](http://theweek.com/contest) on Friday, Nov. 21. In the case of identical or similar entries, the first one received gets credit.

◀ **The winner gets a one-year subscription to *The Week*.**



## Sudoku

Fill in all the boxes so that each row, column, and outlined square includes all the numbers from 1 through 9.

Difficulty: hard

			1					4
		8						9
	1		2	5				
		4		7				9
	5		4	9			1	
6				1		7		
			9	8			3	
		3				8		
	2			4				

Find the solutions to all *The Week's* puzzles online at [theweek.com/solutions](http://theweek.com/solutions)

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