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▲ An agent of the prosecutor’s office stands guard near a bus set on fire by members of organized crime groups in Zapopan, Mexico, on Feb. 22, 2026.

Violence Breaks Out Across Mexico After Cartel Kingpin Killed

Dozens of cartel members, Mexican security forces killed following capture attempt, authorities say

By Ryan Morgan

An operation by Mexican security forces to capture a top cartel figure triggered a wave of violence that spread across Mexico on Feb. 22. Mexican military and police forces carried out an interagency raid to capture Nemesio Rubén Oseguera

Cervantes, also known as “El Mencho,” whom authorities considered the leader of the Jalisco New Generation cartel (CJNG). Oseguera Cervantes was instead struck by gunfire during the bust and died of his wounds. It wasn’t long after the raid against Oseguera Cervantes that cartel mem-

bers began torching gas stations and banking institutions and setting up barricades throughout Jalisco and other neighboring Mexican states. As the chaos unfolded, the U.S. government began issuing “shelter in place” instructions for Americans in the country.

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▲ The Queen B Vinyl Café in Cottonwood, Ariz., in August 2025.

Finding Solutions to America’s Loneliness Epidemic

Community leaders are creating new spaces to pull Americans out of social isolation

By Jacob Burg

Like many Americans who felt burned out and isolated after the government shuttered thousands of small businesses and forced many inside for weeks and months on end during the COVID-19 pandemic, Olivia D’Amico saw the need to forge a new kind of community in her hometown of Bradenton, Florida. The lockdowns that halted concerts and many other communal activities also closed the church where D’Amico worked, depriving her and so many others of their spiritual sanctuary—not just a house of worship, but also a place for members to gather and bond.

“It was really hard for me to even figure out, like, what’s next for all of us? And at the time, we didn’t know what it looked like; there was a lot of fear,” she told The Epoch Times. D’Amico crafted a creative solution: the Friendly City Foundation, a nonprofit that hosts concerts, art clubs and festivals, and other community events. The foundation partners with local businesses to host its events, particularly Oscura, a thriving cafe, bar, and music venue that functions as a “third place” in downtown Bradenton. Sociologist Ray Oldenburg coined the term “third place” in his 1989

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Trump Honors Angel Families With Day of Remembrance

By Travis Gillmore

WASHINGTON—President Donald Trump issued a proclamation at the White House on Feb. 23, establishing Feb. 22 as National Angel Family Day to honor Americans killed by illegal immigrants. “We’re gathered here today for a truly solemn occasion,” Trump said while welcoming hundreds of family members to the East Room ceremony. “These are the Angel families that we love, that for decades our government betrayed and our media totally ignored.” The day was chosen in remembrance of Laken Riley, a 22-year-old nursing student who was murdered by José Ibarra, an illegal immigrant from Venezuela, while she was jogging on the campus of



▲ President Donald Trump embraces Marie Vega, who lost her son Javier Vega, at the White House on Feb. 23, 2026.

the University of Georgia on Feb. 22, 2024. “Laken was viciously attacked, brutally beaten, and murdered by an illegal alien gang member who the last administration heartlessly released into our country,”

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Tariffs or Trade Deals

Trump warns of tariff hikes if trade deals broken

SEESTORY ON **A10**

CONTAINER SHIPS AT THE PORT OF LOS ANGELES ON FEB. 20, 2026.

Beijing Attacks Falun Gong With Fake News Websites

Graphika report finds CCP uses Chinese PR and marketing companies to operate sites

By Petr Svab

Dozens of websites linked to Chinese companies have been used to push Beijing’s propaganda overseas while pretending to be legacy Western outlets, according to a report by Graphika, which specializes in research into foreign influence. The websites copied design elements in order to fraudulently present themselves as such outlets as The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Los Angeles Times, The Guardian, and others. Aside from commercial and pro-China content, they also ran articles attacking Falun Gong, a faith group brutally persecuted by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), according to the report. “We identified evidence that these companies and/or individuals leveraged these domains in contracts to promote the activities undertaken by [CCP-linked] entities,” the report reads.

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US-Born Olympian Competing for China Prompts Concern

Questions resurface about China’s recruitment of foreign-born athletes

By Michael Zhuang

Ever since American-born freestyle skier Eileen Gu stepped onto the podium at the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, draped in China’s red flag, she became one of the most recognizable faces of the Games. This year at the Milan Cortina Winter Olympics, she once again represented China. Her success was celebrated across Chinese state media as a symbol of national rejuvenation and global influence. However, Gu is not an isolated case. Her rise highlights a broader, more controversial effort by Beijing to recruit foreign athletes through state-backed naturalization programs.

Naturalization for Sports
In the years leading up to the 2026 Winter Olympics, Chinese leader Xi Jinping publicly acknowledged efforts to strengthen China’s winter sports by fostering “stronger global ties” with athletes from other countries. Chinese media outlets do not shy away from reporting on the naturalization of foreign athletes to represent China in the Olympics. The most visible cluster of

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Army Corps of Engineers Announces Infrastructure Reforms

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Paralyzing Blizzard Hits Northeast

NATION **A5**

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Army Corps of Engineers Announces Reforms to Balance Critical Infrastructure Workload

By Ryan Morgan

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced a series of reforms on Feb. 23 in the hopes of more efficiently delivering on its portfolio of critical infrastructure projects.

With roots stretching back to the Continental Army and the American Revolution, the Army Corps of Engineers oversees a mix of military construction and construction of domestic critical infrastructure and other civil works projects. The Army’s construction agency is also responsible for ensuring the navigability of U.S. waterways and oversees about a quarter of the hydropower generation capacity of the United States.

Dubbed the “Building Infrastructure, Not Paperwork” initiative, the update covers five main areas of reform efforts for the Army agency.

Speaking with The Epoch Times ahead of the initiative’s rollout, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works Adam Telle said the plan “will enable the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to deliver critical projects and programs for the nation more efficiently, sooner, and at less cost than the current ways of doing business.”

The first area of effort entails maximizing the Corps of Engineers’ capacity to complete national infrastructure projects. The Army agency is set to adopt a new framework for contracting as part of this specific line of effort.

One area of civil works the Army Corps of Engineers is responsible for is dredging



An Army Corps of Engineers dredging craft on the Mississippi River south of New Orleans on Oct. 17, 2023.

The U.S. flag and the flag of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Broome County, N.Y., on July 1, 2025.



THOMAS I. DEATON/U.S. ARMY VIA DVIDS

waterways, but Telle said that rising dredging costs and a current highly localized contracting model have made this section of the project portfolio difficult to manage.

Telle said the push for smarter contracting on this particular issue will include elevating dredging to a national level of visibility so the Army Corps of Engineers can better assess what factors are affecting the contracting market and more effectively assign projects.

“The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will accelerate project delivery with smarter contracting, higher design standards, and a reformed partnership pipeline to build the infrastructure America needs faster,” Telle said.

A second area of effort entails streamlining permitting processes for Army Corps of Engineers projects.

Telle said there are uncertainties about the geographic scope of the Clean Water Act, which refers to “the waters of the United States” as features to be protected from pollutants.

Among its permitting fixes, the Army Corps of Engineers intends to develop geospatial assessment tools to remove

ambiguity about which areas fall under the federal jurisdiction described in the Clean Water Act.

“This will eliminate bureaucratic delays and provide fast, clear decisions needed to save lives and empower our economy,” Telle told The Epoch Times.

The third area of effort focuses on optimizing the usage of Army Corps of Engineers resources and enforcing discipline in how Corps of Engineers leaders communicate with states and localities about the feasibility of delivering on certain infrastructure projects.

Currently, the Army Corps of Engineers allocates funding to its 44 geographic districts based on their project workload. Telle said this model can create an incentive for district leaders to advocate open-ended projects that can fall outside the scope of available funding. Failure to deliver on these projects can then damage relationships with localities.

The reform plan calls for the various Army Corps of Engineers districts to focus on projects and functions that are core to the agency’s mission.

In the fourth line of effort, the Army

Corps of Engineers will seek to apply transparency measures to instill a culture of fiscal discipline across the agency and cut back on wasteful or inefficient practices.

Telle’s office said the inclusion of salaries within project line-item costs can mask how federal funding is being spent. As a proposed fix, the Corps of Engineers will separate these employee salary cost lines from other project line items to more closely monitor both personnel and overhead costs.

The fifth and final effort area focuses on how the Corps of Engineers prioritizes its various projects. Telle’s office said the Army’s civil works program will focus on projects that primarily serve national interests.

Telle’s office said that to address this effort area, the Army Corps of Engineers will assign key projects to districts that are available to complete the tasks, regardless of their geographic location. His office said the Army agency would also reach out, when possible, to non-federal experts and authorities to help deliver on lower-priority projects.

US Treasury Yields Sink as Investors Shrug Off Tariff Fiscal Fears

By Andrew Moran

Yields on U.S. Treasury securities have sunk as investors shrug off fiscal fallout after the Supreme Court struck down President Donald Trump’s sweeping global tariffs.

The benchmark 10-year Treasury yield fell by 6 basis points to lower than 4.03 percent at 1:46 p.m. on Feb. 23. The 30-year tumbled by about 4 basis points to 4.69 percent.

The two-year yield, which typically tracks the Federal Reserve’s policy path, erased nearly 4 basis points to about 3.45 percent.

Declining yields signal investor demand for U.S. government bonds.

Last week’s Supreme Court decision to invalidate a large share of the president’s tariff agenda elicited little reaction in the U.S. government bond market.

Leading up to the announcement, market watchers had expressed concern about the impact on federal revenues.

Still, despite a tepid reaction, it might lead to short-term funding pressures, said Jeff Buchbinder, LPL Financial’s chief equity strategist.

“With less tariff income, the Treasury may need to increase issuance modestly, particularly in bills and shorter-dated notes, to offset the lost cash flow,” Buchbinder

said in a note emailed to The Epoch Times.

“This could put upward pressure on yields at the margin, especially in an environment where supply and demand dynamics were already being tested.”

Earlier this month, the Treasury Department projected \$574 billion in borrowing for the first quarter of 2026 and another \$109 billion during the April–June period.

Declining yields signal investor demand for U.S. government bonds.

The high court’s ruling could reduce net revenues by \$1.9 trillion over the next 10 years and increase the national debt by \$2.4 trillion if tariff collections are refunded and the revenue is not replaced, according to the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget.

Trump invoked Sections 122 and 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, imposing a 10 percent tariff on all foreign goods entering the United States. He then raised this level to 15 percent over the weekend.

It remains unclear how much these levies could salvage lost revenue.

Appearing at the Economic Club of Dallas on Feb. 20, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said these new tariff authorities

would not affect revenue projections.

“Treasury’s estimates show that the use of Section 122 authority, combined with potentially enhanced Section 232 and Section 301 tariffs, will result in virtually unchanged tariff revenue in 2026,” Bessent said in prepared remarks.

A recent analysis by the Penn Wharton Budget Model estimates that \$175 billion could be refunded to U.S. importers.

Bessent said he believes that these funds would be locked up in litigation that could be “dragged out for weeks, months, years.”

Refunds are unlikely to be extended to consumers, according to him.

“I got a feeling the American people won’t see it,” Bessent said in a follow-up Q&A session.

This past weekend, the Yale Budget Lab estimated that consumers will now face an overall average effective tariff rate of 9.1 percent without the emergency tariffs—still the highest since 1946.

Customs and Border Protection said the administration would end collections of tariffs deemed illegal “on or after 12:00 a.m. Eastern Time” on Feb. 24.

Wall Street in the Red

Equities could not escape the tariff turmoil.

Trump’s threat to raise temporary tariffs on countries that renege on their trade agreements with the United States triggered a sell-off in stocks.

To kick off the trading week, the blue-chip Dow Jones Industrial Average erased as much as 830 basis points—the worst single-session performance in a month.

The tech-heavy Nasdaq composite index



MADALINA VASILIU/THE EPOCH TIMES

▲ The White House and the Treasury Department on March 10, 2025.

and the broader S&P 500 fell by 1 percent.

This came a day before the president delivers his State of the Union address. Although these remarks typically do not move markets, what Trump says about tariffs or Iran could affect stocks.

“Declining yields signal investor demand for U.S. government bonds, said in a note emailed to The Epoch Times.

“In his speech, we might learn more of his intent to continue to levy tariffs despite the [Supreme Court] decision, and also how close we may be to an escalation of war against Iran. Both of these issues will have an impact on the markets.”

In addition to the tariff fallout and Trump’s speech, investors will also digest the widely watched producer price index on Feb. 27.

The U.S. dollar index, a measure of the greenback against a weighted basket of currencies, tumbled by about 0.1 percent. The index is coming off a weekly gain of nearly 0.9 percent but remains down by 0.7 percent year-to-date.

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◀ President Donald Trump holds up a proclamation dedicating Feb. 22 as Angel Family Day, at the White House on Feb. 23, 2026.

Marie Vega witnessed her son, Javier Vega Jr., a Border Patrol agent and Marine, being murdered by Gustavo Tijerina Sandoval, an illegal immigrant, near the southern border in Texas in 2014. She grabbed a weapon to defend her family during the attack.

“Had we not fired back, they would have killed everyone there, including the children, so that there wouldn’t be any witnesses,” Vega said. “They killed an amazing man, a loving and honorable dad and husband.”

Vega said that without the president, the world would not know about the consequences of lax border policies.

The president championed his border control and immigration enforcement agenda.

“We want to stop murderers and criminals from coming into our country,” Trump said.

He also said that the border is now “100 percent closed.”

Administration officials in attendance included Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem and border czar Tom Homan.

After Trump signed the proclamation, he joined the audience for a candle lighting ceremony and the reading of victims’ names.

In the proclamation, Trump said, “We must end the violence against the brave men and women of ICE and Border Patrol.”

“[The] demonization of these heroes by radical politicians must stop, and the reckless sanctuary policies that shield criminal aliens must end once and for all.”

The president also called on Congress to pass Kate’s Law, named after Kate Steinle, who was fatally shot by an illegal immigrant in June 2015, describing it as “legislation that imposes stronger penalties on individuals who illegally re-enter the United States after being deported, especially those previously convicted of crimes.”

Trump Honors Angel Families, Proclaims National Day of Remembrance

Continued from A1

Trump said. “The story is even more tragic because her death was completely preventable.”

He highlighted policy failures that allowed Ibarra to avoid deportation and be released after he was arrested in August 2023 by New York City police officer Ethan Carrerri.

Carrerri told those gathered at the White House that he detained Ibarra for endangering the welfare of a child.

“I did my job. I put him in custody,” Carrerri said. “The system failed. No

detainer, no accountability, no deportation, and an innocent American life was taken.”

The president signed the Laken Riley Act in January 2025, shortly after his second term began. It requires the federal government to detain illegal immigrants arrested for various criminal offenses.

Riley’s mother, Allyson Phillips, brimmed with emotions as she remembered her daughter and thanked the president.

“If you’ve lived the nightmare that we have lived, you understand the importance of the job that he’s doing and

securing our nation and fighting for our families,” Phillips said, referring to the president. “Because this could be any family.”

Steve Ronnebeck, whose 21-year-old son, Grant, was killed by an illegal immigrant in 2015 while working at a convenience store in Mesa, Arizona, spoke about the importance of the national day of remembrance.

“We are finally going to see that somebody’s going to remember all of our loved ones,” he said. “They’re going to remember the names, and they’re going to remember what we’ve all been through.”

Supreme Court Agrees to Hear Challenge to Climate Lawsuits

By Matthew Vadum

The U.S. Supreme Court on Feb. 23 agreed to take an appeal by oil companies that seek to halt climate-related city and state lawsuits against them.

This case concerns a lawsuit filed by Boulder, Colorado, but many states, such as California and Hawaii, and local governments, such as Chicago and Baltimore, have filed suits against energy companies, arguing that their products contribute to “climate change.” In some suits, they also allege that the companies have misrepresented these risks.

The court granted the petition in Suncor Energy (U.S.A.) Inc. v. County Commissioners of Boulder County in an unsigned

order. The court did not explain its decision. There were no recorded dissents.

Exxon Mobil Corp. is also a co-petitioner. The City of Boulder is a co-respondent.

Boulder alleges that the oil companies misled the public about the risk of fossil fuels to the climate.

The oil companies counter that state law doesn’t allow lawsuits to target such a worldwide issue as “climate change.”

The state-level trial court denied the companies’ motion to dismiss the Boulder lawsuit. A divided Colorado Supreme Court affirmed.

The majority of the state’s high court acknowledged the U.S. Supreme Court’s precedents, which found that claims for relief for injuries alleged to have been

caused by interstate pollution are exclusively governed by federal law. However, that court held that because Congress passed the federal Clean Air Act, state law was allowed to regulate interstate emissions, the companies’ petition said.

“There are few, if any, more consequential questions pending in the lower courts concerning the relationship between state and federal law,” the petition said, adding that the lawsuit belongs in federal court.

“Boulder, Colorado, cannot make energy policy for the entire country.”

The federal government filed a brief supporting the companies’ position.

Deputy U.S. Solicitor General Sarah Harris said that if the Colorado Supreme Court’s ruling is allowed to stand, “every locality in the country could sue essentially anyone in the world for contributing to global climate change.”

The decision is inconsistent with the U.S. Constitution and the provisions of the Clean Air Act “because it conflicts with the decision of a court of appeals on a frequently recurring issue of exceptional importance,” she said.

In Executive Order 14260, President Donald Trump criticized state and local policies that seek to “regulate energy

beyond their constitutional or statutory authorities” by imposing barriers to interstate and international trade, subjecting energy producers to excessive fines.

Every locality in the country could sue essentially anyone in the world for contributing to global climate change.

Sarah Harris, deputy U.S. solicitor general

In the April 2025 order, Trump directed the Department of Justice to take action to stop civil actions and the enforcement of state laws that claim to address “climate change,” “environmental justice,” “greenhouse gas” emissions, or “environmental, social, and governance” (ESG) initiatives.

ESG is a set of standards that is used to measure an organization’s societal and environmental impact. The ESG movement began two decades ago with a U.N. initiative, outlined in a 2004 paper called “Who Cares Wins,” aimed at getting private companies in line with the United Nations’ sustainable development goals.

Attorneys for Boulder argued in a brief that the litigation should remain in state court.

“There is no constitutional bar to states addressing in-state harms caused by out-of-state conduct, be it the negligent design of an automobile or sale of asbestos,” the brief reads.

An oral argument has not yet been scheduled in the newly granted case.



REUTERS/DADO RUVIC/ILLUSTRATION/FILE PHOTO

Millions in Checks Go Out in Student Loan Servicer Settlement

By Bill Pan

Settlement checks are being sent to federal student loan borrowers affected by a long-running case involving former loan servicer Navient.

Under a final judgment entered in 2024, Navient is paying out \$120 million to settle allegations by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) that it engaged in widespread servicing failures. Payments, including \$100 million to affected borrowers, began on Feb. 13, according to the settlement.

The case dates back to 2017, when the CFPB filed suit against Navient, which, at the time, serviced more than 6 million federal student loan accounts. The agency accused the company of steering struggling borrowers into costly, long-term forbearance instead of directing them to more affordable income-driven repayment

\$100 MILLION
The settlement requires Navient to pay \$100 million in redress to affected borrowers.

plans, which allegedly caused borrowers to accrue far more interest over time.

The federal complaint also alleged misapplied payments, inaccurate credit reporting, and misleading information provided about repayment options and co-signer release.

Navient has stated that it disagrees with the allegations. Still, the company agreed to the settlement, which includes a ban on servicing most federal student loans going forward. Navient had already pulled out of the student loan market in 2021, when its remaining portfolio was transferred to another servicer, Aidvantage.

The settlement also requires Navient to pay \$100 million in redress to affected borrowers and a \$20 million penalty to the CFPB victims’ relief fund. Eligible borrowers will receive checks by mail.

To qualify for a redress payment, a borrower must have had one or more student

loans serviced by Navient Solutions or Pioneer Credit Recovery and must have been identified in Navient’s records as harmed by the companies’ servicing practices. That may include being steered into forbearance instead of being offered income-driven repayment options, experiencing misapplied payments or inaccurate credit reporting, or receiving misinformation about repayment options.

The amount of each payment varies. The settlement administrator calculates payments based on factors such as the total number of eligible borrowers, the number and size of loans involved, and the nature and extent of the documented harm. Early recipients have reported on social media, including Reddit’s r/StudentLoans community, that checks range from a few hundred dollars to several thousand dollars.

Eligible borrowers do not need to submit a claim form or take any action to receive

payment. Consumers who believe that they may qualify but have not received a check can contact Rust Consulting, the settlement payment administrator, according to the CFPB.

The CFPB has also emphasized that the redress payments are separate from borrowers’ underlying loan balances. The payments do not change the amount the borrowers may still owe, and they should continue working with their current servicers for repayment and account management, according to the CFPB.

The agency also warned consumers to watch for scammers who may try to obtain money or personal information from people expecting settlement payments.

“The CFPB will never require consumers to pay money to obtain redress, nor will we ask for additional information before consumers can cash a redress check that we’ve issued,” the agency stated.

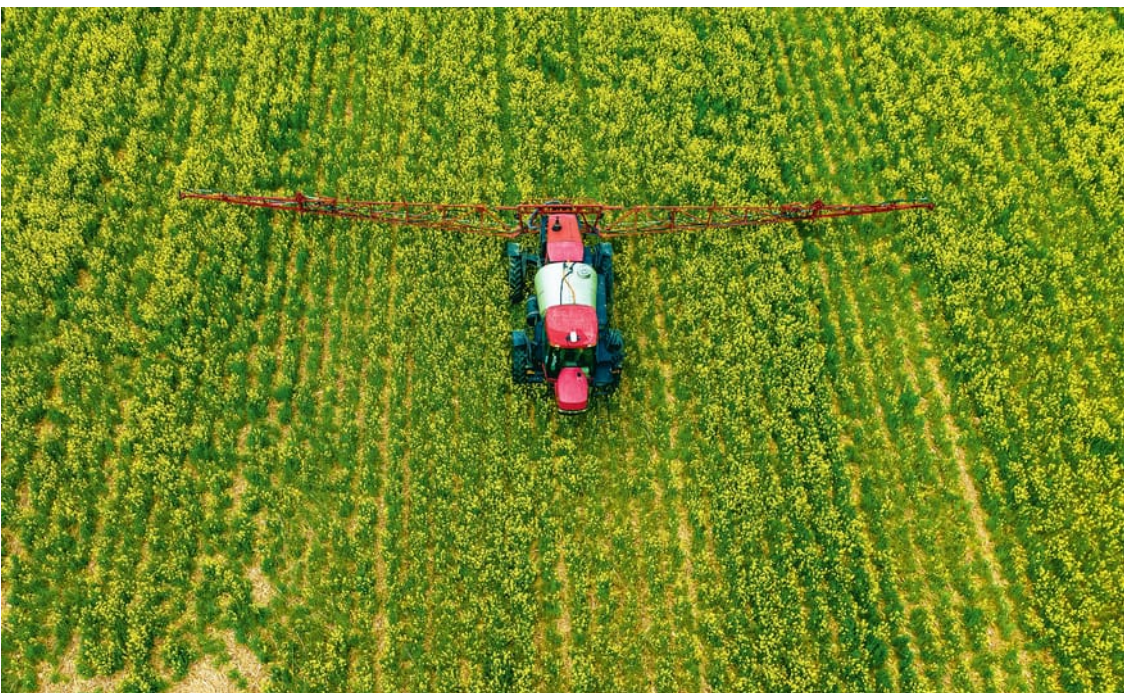


MAHA Proponents React to Trump’s Executive Order on Glyphosate

By Jeff Louderback

Invoking the Defense Production Act, President Donald Trump signed an executive order on Feb. 18, propelling the domestic production of elemental phosphorus and glyphosate-based herbicides. The decision sparked widespread backlash among Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) proponents who are fighting to prevent herbicide and pesticide manufacturers from gaining immunity from legal actions. Known as the “Glyphosate Girl,” Kelly Ryerson is the founder of the Glyphosate Facts website and co-executive director of regenerative farming initiative American Regeneration. On Feb. 19, she told The Epoch Times that the order “signals to Bayer and Big Ag that the White House supports them and won’t concede to the concerns of MAHA.” “It doubles down on a system that is making us a sick population and killing our soil, and we already have a limited number of harvests left,” Ryerson said. “It is a very short-term fix for the real problem in national security, which is disease and infertility in both the body and our farming systems.” Through its subsidiary Monsanto, Bayer is the only U.S. producer of glyphosate, which is the key ingredient in Roundup. It is the most widely used herbicide in history, according to the Global Glyphosate Study. Today, 280 million pounds of glyphosate are sprayed on 285 million acres of U.S. farmland every year, according to the nonprofit Center for Food Safety, which advocates for organic and sustainable food. Shortages of phosphorus and glyphosate would create a risk to national security, Trump declared in the executive order.

Health Secretary: Trump’s Order ‘Puts America First’
As an environmental lawyer in 2018, Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. helped win a \$290 million lawsuit against Monsanto in a case in which a man said his cancer was caused by Roundup. On Feb. 19, Kennedy defended Trump’s move. “Donald Trump’s Executive Order puts America first where it matters most—our defense readiness and our food supply,” Kennedy said in a statement to The Epoch Times on Feb. 19. “We must safeguard America’s national security first, because all of our priorities depend on it. When hostile actors control critical inputs, they weaken our security. By expanding domestic



JIM WATSON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

▲ A farmer spreads pesticide on a field in Centreville, Md., on April 25, 2022.



▲ Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.
MADALINA KILROY/
THE EPOCH TIMES

production, we close that gap and protect American families.” Elemental phosphorus is a key ingredient in the formulation of glyphosate, which the White House said is essential to maintain food security. According to the executive order, the Department of the Interior has designated elemental phosphorus as a scarce material. The executive order called glyphosate-based herbicides “the most widely used crop protection tools in United States agriculture” and “a cornerstone of this Nation’s agricultural productivity and rural economy, allowing United States farmers and ranchers to maintain high yields and low production costs while ensuring that healthy, affordable food options remain within reach for all American families.” Last year, Bayer CEO Bill Anderson said the company may stop making glyphosate because of liabilities from the lawsuits. A day before the president signed his executive order, Bayer announced that Monsanto submitted a proposal for a \$7.25 billion class-action settlement. The settlement, which still needs approval by a judge, would cover current and future claims for people who were exposed to Roundup and developed non-Hodgkin lymphoma. The proposed settlement is not an admission of wrongdoing, the company said. In 2020, Bayer agreed to a separate \$10 billion settlement regarding non-Hodgkin lymphoma claims. Trump’s executive order was also issued after the Supreme Court agreed to hear a Roundup case in April. Bayer filed the appeal against a \$1.25 million award to a

Missouri man who alleged that Roundup caused him to develop blood cancer. **Monsanto: Roundup Is Safe** Monsanto has maintained that Roundup is safe and is not carcinogenic, whereas MAHA advocates have singled out glyphosate as a contributing factor to long-term health effects in children. Monsanto spokesman Brian Leake said in a statement to The Epoch Times: “President Trump’s executive order reinforces the critical need for U.S. farmers to have access to essential, domestically produced crop protection tools such as glyphosate. We will comply with this order to produce glyphosate and elemental phosphorus.” **Potential Impacts of the Order** In an X post on Feb. 18, the House Committee on Agriculture thanked Trump “for acknowledging the importance of glyphosate-based herbicides in American agriculture.” “This is a vital step forward in ensuring a domestic supply of this critical crop input remains available for our producers,” it stated. Ryerson told The Epoch Times that Trump’s order could hurt Republican candidates in midterm elections. “The MAHA base is vast, and people are starting to consider who they will support at midterms. Now the president issues an executive order to expand domestic glyphosate production—the same carcinogenic pesticide that MAHA cares about most,” she said. Zen Honeycutt, executive director of Moms Across America, told The Epoch Times that although she is “disgusted” with Trump’s executive order, she believes

that more farmers are moving away from glyphosate and an increasing number of consumers are avoiding foods and glyphosate and genetically modified organisms. John Klar agrees. A regenerative farmer who raises grass-fed beef in Vermont and the author of “Small Farm Republic,” Klar told The Epoch Times that he believes that Trump’s executive order will motivate more Americans to buy organic products and take an interest in how their food is grown and raised. “All we want in MAHA is a free market to compete, not mandates and prohibitions against others. If other people want to eat glyphosate-laced foods, that remains their prerogative. The executive order changes nothing,” Klar said.

Legal Immunity Through the Defense Production Act, the order grants Section 707 compliance immunity, which means that companies will be protected from liability for actions while complying with federal directives. “This creates a significant legal shield that may complicate future litigation against glyphosate manufacturers,” Nicolas Hulscher, an epidemiologist and administrator for the McCullough Foundation, told The Epoch Times on Feb. 19. “It doesn’t automatically eliminate cancer lawsuits, but it could allow producers to argue that certain production or allocation decisions were federally mandated under national defense authority, and that’s a concern.”

‘A Real Contradiction’ On Dec. 10, Kennedy announced a \$700 million pilot program that will give farmers who are dependent on chemical and fertilizer inputs a financial off-ramp to help them transition to a model that emphasizes soil health. The program aligns with the Make America Healthy Again Commission’s focus on addressing the nation’s chronic disease epidemic by strengthening the nutrient density in food and decreasing reliance on chemicals, Kennedy said. Kari Bundy is a self-described “MAHA mom,” a homesteader who uses regenerative growing methods, and a MAHA activist. She called Trump’s order “a real contradiction, and honestly, it’s frustrating to see.” “The \$700 million was a positive first step in HHS and the USDA supporting farmers who want to move away from heavy reliance on synthetic herbicides and toward systems that actually heal the land and support family health,” Bundy said. “Now, this executive order basically treats glyphosate as a strategic necessity we need to safeguard, even as MAHA has been pushing to reduce exactly these kinds of chemicals because of their links to chronic disease.”

Troy Myers and Zach Steiber contributed to this report.

RFK Jr. Defends Trump’s Glyphosate Order

By Zachary Stieber

Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. on Feb. 22 said that glyphosate is poisonous but necessary as he backed President Donald Trump’s recent order designating the production of the herbicide as critical to national security. In a lengthy post on social media, Kennedy said pesticides and herbicides are toxic. “When we apply them across millions of acres and allow them into our food system, we put Americans at risk,” he wrote. “Chemical manufacturers have paid tens of billions of dollars to settle cancer claims linked to their products, and many agricultural communities report elevated cancer rates and chronic disease. Unfortunately, our agricultural system depends heavily on these chemicals.” If the United States were to stop using the products, then “crop yields would fall, food prices would surge, and America would experience a massive loss of farms even beyond what [it is] witnessing today,” Kennedy said. He described Trump’s order as protecting national defense and the nation’s food

supply, stating that Trump inherited the current agricultural system and that his administration is shifting from it without destabilizing the food supply. “We are accelerating the transition to regenerative agriculture by expanding farming systems that rebuild soil, increase biodiversity, improve water retention, and reduce reliance on synthetic chemicals, including pre-harvest desiccation,” Kennedy wrote. **Trump inherited the current agricultural system, and his administration is shifting from it without destabilizing the food supply, Kennedy said.** “We are also driving the rapid adoption of next-generation technologies, including laser-guided weed control, electrothermal and electrical systems, robotics, precision mechanical cultivation, and biological controls that replace blanket spraying with precision intervention. “These solutions are not theoretical. Farmers are already putting them to work. Markets are scaling them. Now the federal government will act with urgency to expand their reach and accelerate adoption nationwide.” Kennedy said later: “The Make America Healthy Again agenda forces us to chal-

lenge long-standing assumptions about how we grow food, structure markets, and measure success in this country. Reform at this scale will test entrenched interests, and it will not move in a straight line.” In his Feb. 18 order, Trump said herbicides with glyphosate are widely used in the United States and enable farmers to achieve high yields and low production costs. “There is no direct one-for-one chemical alternative to glyphosate-based herbicides,” the president wrote. “Lack of access to glyphosate-based herbicides would critically jeopardize agricultural productivity, adding pressure to the domestic food system, and may result in a transition of cropland to other uses due to low productivity. “Given the profit margins growers currently face, any major restrictions in access to glyphosate-based herbicides would result in economic losses for growers and make it untenable for them to meet growing food and feed demands.” He designated production of glyphosate as a critical national security and directed Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins to ensure that there is an adequate supply of the herbicides and elemental phosphorus, one of the ingredients in the products. Some people supportive of the Make America Healthy Again movement criticized the designation. Kelly Ryerson, coexecutive director of American Regeneration, told The Epoch Times that it “doubles down” on a system that is making the U.S. population sick and killing the soil. “We already have a limited number of harvests left,” she said.

Bayer, which produces glyphosate-based herbicide Roundup, just proposed a \$7 billion settlement to resolve thousands of lawsuits that allege that Roundup caused cancer. Bayer maintains that Roundup is not carcinogenic and can be used safely. That stance is shared by the Environmental Protection Agency, although the International Agency for Research on Cancer lists glyphosate as probably carcinogenic. Kennedy, while running for president in 2024, said in a post on X that glyphosate was “one of the likely culprits in America’s chronic disease epidemic” and that the Department of Agriculture would, if he won the election, ban its use as a desiccant on wheat. His Make America Healthy Again Commission in 2025 also said that glyphosate studies “have noted a range of possible health effects, ranging from reproductive and developmental disorders as well as cancers, liver inflammation and metabolic disturbances.” Kennedy said in a previous statement to The Epoch Times, after Trump signed the new glyphosate order: “When hostile actors control critical inputs, they weaken our security. By expanding domestic production, we close that gap and protect American families.” Zen Honeycutt, founder of Moms Across America, said in response to Kennedy’s post on X that she understands aspects of his position but that after about a year of the Trump administration being in power, officials have not worked to limit people’s exposure to pesticides. “We love you Bobby but this administration needs to keep their word,” she said in a Feb. 23 post on X. “We were promised specifically clean air, clean water, and addressing of the pesticides [in] our foods.”

Roundup products at a hardware store in San Rafael, Calif., on July, 9, 2018.



JOSH EDELSON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

3 Indicted for Allegedly Trafficking Mexican Workers in Visa Scheme

By Troy Myers

Three individuals were charged with trafficking Mexican workers into forced labor at farms in Virginia, North Carolina, and Florida, the Department of Justice (DOJ) announced on Feb. 23.

A federal grand jury delivered the 35-count indictment, which was unsealed on Feb. 20, accusing the defendants of exploiting an immigrant work visa program and subjecting the victims to inhumane conditions, according to a DOJ statement.

The H-2A visa program allows U.S. employers to contract foreign nationals to fill temporary or seasonal U.S. agricultural jobs. The defendants promised legitimate employment opportunities to “vulnerable” workers, then forced them into labor, prosecutors said.

“These charges reflect the Department’s commitment to protecting the integrity of our lawful immigration system and holding accountable those who corrupt it to exploit and abuse foreign workers,” the DOJ’s Criminal Division Assistant Attorney General Andrew Duva said. “The Criminal Division will continue to investigate and prosecute forced labor and human trafficking wherever it occurs.”

The accused are Martha Zeferino Jose, a Mexican citizen and permanent U.S. resident, who owned and operated a farm labor contracting company called Las Princesas Corporation in Washington,

North Carolina, with her partner, Jose Rodriguez Muñoz, a Mexican citizen unlawfully in the United States. Zeferino Jose’s son, Jeremy Zeferino Jose, a Mexican citizen and permanent U.S. resident, is named as the third defendant.

Attorneys for the defendants did not immediately respond to a request for comment from The Epoch Times.

Recruiters for Las Princesas charged exorbitant fees to Mexican workers for the opportunity to work in the United States, crippling them with debt before they even arrived, prosecutors said.

We do not tolerate abuse of the system to hurt unsuspecting victims of human trafficking.

Ellis Boyle, U.S. attorney, Eastern District of North Carolina

Once the workers made it to the United States, the three defendants allegedly took their passports, visas, and other identification documents to prevent them from leaving, according to prosecutors.

Victims had no other choice but to comply and suffer harsh working conditions, with long hours and little access to water, at farms and plant nurseries across



Farm workers labor in the fields south of Bakersfield, Calif., on April 9, 2025.

Virginia, North Carolina, and Florida, according to the indictment. The workers were housed in crowded, unsanitary residences without heat, air conditioning, hot water, and bedding, it said.

Often, the workers were denied food and medical care, prosecutors said.

If the workers did not comply, they also faced arrest and deportation threats from the three defendants.

Martha Zeferino Jose and her partner obstructed the onset of the investigation, started by the Labor Department’s Wage and Hour Division, the DOJ alleged. It said that prior to the investigators’ arrival at Las Princesas, the pair returned the workers’ documents and demanded that they tell officials that conditions at the company were fine or face deportation if they told the truth.

Each of the three defendants is charged with forced labor, conspiracy to commit forced labor, alien harboring for financial gain, conspiracy to commit alien harboring for financial gain, and document servitude offenses, according to the DOJ statement.

The owner and operator of Las Princesas, Martha Zeferino Jose, is additionally

charged with visa fraud. Muñoz is facing an additional obstruction charge. Both are charged with conspiracy to obstruct proceedings before agencies.

“We will find and eradicate any illegal immigration we find,” U.S. Attorney Ellis Boyle for the Eastern District of North Carolina said. “We do not tolerate abuse of the system to hurt unsuspecting victims of human trafficking.”

In an effort to address farm labor shortages created by an increase in deportations, President Donald Trump said in August 2025 that he would allow some deported agricultural workers who were illegally in the country to return legally.

“We’re sending them back, and then they’re schooling, they’re learning, they’re coming in. They’re coming in legally. We have a lot of that going on, but we’re taking care of our farmers. We can’t let our farmers not have anybody,” Trump said.

All three defendants could be sentenced to decades in prison if convicted, according to the DOJ.

The Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Labor, and the Office of Inspector General are investigating this case.

Paralyzing Blizzard Hits US Northeast, Closing Roads and Canceling Flights

NEW YORK CITY—A powerful blizzard dropped more than 2 1/2 feet of snow across parts of the U.S. Northeast on Feb. 23, bringing travel to a near-standstill for millions of residents as the treacherous conditions closed roads, shut down train services, and forced the cancellation of some 7,400 flights.

Thousands of homes and businesses lost power, and officials, including New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, urged residents to stay off the roads so emergency crews could clear the streets. Schools in New York and throughout the region were closed. Broadway shut its theaters.

“New York remains in a state of emergency,” Mamdani said. “The travel ban has ended today at noon, but a hazardous travel advisory remains in place through midnight tonight.”

More than 19 inches of snow had fallen on New York City’s Central Park by 1 p.m. on Feb. 23, and more than 14 inches fell in Boston, according to Bob Oravec, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service’s Weather Prediction Center.

Winds, at times reaching 60 mph, blew snowdrifts several feet high.

“It’ll probably take a week to dig out,” Oravec said.

Philadelphia received 14 inches, and

Winds, at times reaching 60 miles per hour, blew snowdrifts several feet high.

Providence, Rhode Island, was buried under more than 32 inches of snow, a record for the city.

More than 608,711 homes and businesses across the U.S. were without power as of the afternoon of Feb. 23, according to PowerOutage.us. That included one in 10 of the nearly 3 million power customers PowerOutage.us tracks in Massachusetts.

Many were astounded by the depth of the snowfall. Sandra Wu said that in her 20 years or so living in New Hyde Park, on hard-hit Long Island, she had never seen a winter storm this bad. Her family could not open the front door and could barely see out of some windows because of the high snowdrifts.

“My husband went out early through the garage to start digging us out, but it was pointless,” Wu said.

Wu, 53, a veterinarian, said the storm, which had dropped about 18 inches of snow, reminded her of the storms in the

1990s when she lived in Buffalo, New York, which gets an average annual snowfall of 92 inches.

Her two children, ages 13 and 5, were thrilled to have a snow day off from school, so they slept in.

“We thought we’d lose power, thankfully not,” she said. “So we’re baking today. There’s nothing else to do while we wait for the snow to stop.”

Regional Emergencies

At least seven U.S. states had declared states of emergency in response to the storm as of Feb. 23.

Airlines had canceled more than 7,400 flights by the afternoon of Feb. 23 and delayed another 2,300, according to the tracking site FlightAware.com. That figure included more than 1,800 canceled Feb. 24 flights, according to the site. Most of the cancellations and delays were in the Northeast, including New York City’s John F. Kennedy International and LaGuardia airports, Boston’s Logan Airport, and New Jersey’s Newark Liberty International Airport.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul said she had activated 100 National Guard members to assist on Long Island, in New York City, and in the lower Hudson Valley, areas expected to bear the brunt of the heavy snow and coastal winds. The storm forced the closure of the U.N. headquarters complex in Manhattan on Feb. 23.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said that despite its ongoing funding lapse, the Federal Emergency

Management Agency (FEMA) would continue its disaster-response work uninterrupted, including staff travel, emergency operations, and critical assistance for people affected by active disasters.

Last week, Reuters reported that the Trump administration had ordered FEMA to suspend the deployment of hundreds of aid workers to disaster-affected areas around the country while DHS is shut down.

Massachusetts Gov. Maura Healey declared an emergency and told state workers to stay home. Connecticut barred commercial vehicles from limited-access highways, exempting only emergency and essential deliveries.

Train and bus commuter lines in New Jersey were halted, and the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority said it would suspend all service through Feb. 23 and would announce plans to resume service only when conditions improve.

Even some ships were caught by the storm. Wu said her elderly in-laws were stuck on a cruise ship docked in New York Harbor, which could not start sailing to the Bahamas on a planned vacation.

But Wu said they were enjoying themselves despite the delay.

“They are having the best time with 20 of their friends, eating well with plenty of entertainment,” while they wait for the storm to pass, Wu said.

By Rajesh Kumar Singh & Rich McKay From Reuters

CDC’s No. 2 Official Steps Down

By Zachary Stieber

One of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s top officials has suddenly resigned, the latest change in staffing at Trump administration health agencies.

Dr. Ralph Abraham, the principal deputy director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), resigned effective immediately, the CDC said in a statement on Feb. 23.

The reason provided for the resignation was “unforeseen family obligations.”

“It has been an honor to serve alongside the dedicated public health professionals at the CDC and to support the agency’s critical mission,” Abraham said in a statement.

The CDC did not immediately respond to a request for more information.

Abraham was appointed by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in late 2025. He had been Louisiana’s surgeon general and a representative in Congress in the past.

The position of CDC deputy director was listed as vacant on the CDC’s website on Feb. 23, as was the position of deputy director for program and science and chief medical officer.

Several lower-level managerial positions, such as the head of the CDC’s Washington office, are also vacant.

Jim O’Neill, who was acting CDC director and deputy health secretary, resigned earlier in February from those

positions. A White House official said the administration plans to tap O’Neill as head of the National Science Foundation, a federal agency that promotes scientific advancement.

Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, director of the National Institutes of Health—part of HHS, like the CDC—has been made the new acting CDC director.

Bhattacharya has not responded to requests for comment.

The only Senate-confirmed CDC director in history, Susan Monarez, was terminated over the summer after clashing with Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. on the issue of vaccines. O’Neill, whom senators confirmed as Kennedy’s top deputy, took over the agency shortly after that.

Monarez and some CDC officials who departed after her firing have said that

officials are not running the agency properly. HHS officials have said those officials were blocking important work, including revamping the CDC’s vaccine recommendations and vaccine injury reporting systems.

Abraham, as Louisiana’s top health official, was critical of COVID-19 shots. Also, under his leadership, Louisiana officials stopped promoting mass vaccination. Abraham said in a letter that “government should admit the limitations of its role in people’s lives and pull back its tentacles from the practice of medicine” and that restoring public trust “requires returning medical decisions to the doctor-patient relationship, where informed, personalized care is guided by compassion and expertise rather than blanket government mandates.”

Supreme Court to Hear Lawsuits Over Americans’ Seized Assets in Cuba

By Matthew Vadum

The U.S. Supreme Court is poised to hear two cases on Feb. 23 about U.S. business assets that Cuba’s communist government seized decades ago.

Both cases focus on the 1996 Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act that was created to pressure Cuba by penalizing foreign companies “trafficking” in property that the Cuban regime seized from U.S. interests.

Also known as the Helms-Burton Act, the law allows U.S. citizens and companies to sue any person who traffics in or uses confiscated property. Trafficking in the statute includes using or profiting from the confiscated property.

The law defines “person” to include “any agency or instrumentality of a foreign state,” and contemplates civil judgments being obtained against “an agency or instrumentality of the Cuban Government.”

Cuba’s late dictator Fidel Castro overthrew the then-government in 1959 and turned Cuba into a one-party state in which socialist policies were implemented, including the nationalization of the assets of foreign businesses operating in Cuba at the time.

In *Exxon Mobil v. Corporacion Cimex*, Exxon Mobil is seeking compensation from three Cuban government-owned companies for energy assets seized in 1960, after the communists took power. The company was previously known as Standard Oil Co.

Until recently, parties like Exxon were unable to pursue claims against Cuban government-owned enterprises under the Helms-Burton Act because President Bill Clinton suspended Title III—the part of the law allowing compensation lawsuits to be filed. In his first term, President Donald Trump revoked the suspension on May 2, 2019, and Exxon Mobil filed its lawsuit the same day.

The legal issue in the case is whether the Helms-Burton Act “abrogates foreign sovereign immunity” in cases against Cuban entities, the company stated in its petition.

Foreign sovereign immunity is a legal doctrine that prevents governments from being sued unless they agree to be sued. Abrogation is the act of formally annulling a law or legal provision.

In 2024, a divided U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit ruled that a separate federal statute poses an additional hurdle for lawsuits against Cuban entities. That court held that Title III claims may only proceed against Cuban entities if the lawsuit falls under an exception in the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act, which generally forbids lawsuits against foreign governments but allows suits involving commercial activities or property seized in violation of international law.

The appeals court ruled that when the district court considered the case, it failed to properly analyze whether the commercial activities exception applied and sent



▲ People outside the Havana Cruise Terminal port on Feb. 23, 2026.

the case back to that court for further consideration.

Exxon Mobil is arguing that the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act shouldn’t be interpreted to deprive the company of the judicial remedies promised by Helms-Burton.

Cuban government-owned company Corporacion Cimex argued in a brief that if Exxon’s legal argument prevails, it could open U.S. courts to a flood of lawsuits against foreign entities like itself, despite the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act protections.

The other case, *Havana Docks Corp. v. Royal Caribbean Cruises*, involves U.S.-based company Havana Docks Corp., which, in its petition, described the case as “the most important case involving U.S. foreign policy toward Cuba to reach this Court in the past [60] years.”

Havana Docks Corp. built the port of Havana’s docks at its own expense in exchange for a concession to run those docks for 99 years. The Cuban government unilaterally ended the concession without compensation in 1960, which had 44 years left to run, along with the company’s property interest in the docks, according to the petition.

In October 2024, a divided U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit overturned a more than \$100 million judgment against various cruise lines for trafficking in confiscated property by using expropriated docks in Cuba.

The appeals court held that the cruise lines could not be held liable for using the port facilities because Havana Docks’s property interest “expired in 2004,” according to the provisions of the 99-year



▲ The Supreme Court in Washington on Feb. 21, 2026.

The legal issue in the case is whether the Helms-Burton Act ‘abrogates foreign sovereign immunity’ in cases against Cuban entities.

concession that the company was originally granted.

The appeals court “effectively nullified” the right to sue under Title III, the company stated in the petition.

The petition states that the cruise lines used the confiscated docks even after

the U.S. Department of Justice’s Foreign Claims Settlement Commission certified Havana Docks’s claim against Cuba for taking its property interest in the docks.

The cruise lines disembarked almost 1 million tourists on the docks from 2015 to 2019, paying Cuba at least \$130 million and earning more than \$1 billion from their Cuban cruises, the petition states.

The cruise lines argue that Havana Docks Corp. has no legal claim against them because even though that company once had permission to use the docks, it never actually owned the docks, which always remained the property of the Cuban government.

The Supreme Court is expected to rule on the two cases by the end of June.

Nick Reiner Pleads Not Guilty in the Killing of His Parents Rob Reiner and Michele Singer Reiner

By Elma Aksalic

Nick Reiner pleaded not guilty on Feb. 23 to two counts of first-degree murder in the stabbing death of his parents, prolific actor and director Rob Reiner and his wife, Michele Singer Reiner.

Deputy public defender and Nick Reiner’s attorney, Kimberly Greene, entered the plea on his behalf in a Los Angeles courtroom.

The 32-year-old was also present during arraignment, briefly making remarks to his lawyer and answering only yes-or-no questions from the judge.

Nick Reiner has been held in custody without bail since his Dec. 15, 2025, arrest, when he was booked on suspicion of murdering his parents.

A preliminary hearing is scheduled for April 29, when a judge will decide, based on prosecutorial evidence, whether or not the case will go to trial.

According to Los Angeles County District Attorney Nathan Hochman, it is unclear whether the DA’s office will pursue the death penalty.

On Dec. 14, 2025, authorities responded to a medical emergency call at a home in

the Brentwood neighborhood of Los Angeles, where responders found the bodies of a 78-year-old man and a 68-year-old woman, later identified as the Reiners.

The Los Angeles County Medical Examiner listed the official cause of death as “multiple sharp force injuries.”

Later that day, family members issued a statement to announce “the tragic passing of Michele and Rob Reiner.”

“We are heartbroken by this sudden loss, and we ask for privacy during this unbelievably difficult time,” they said.

On Dec. 16, Nick Reiner was charged with first-degree murder with special circumstances. He had his first court appearance in December, represented by attorney Alan Jackson.

Jackson removed himself from the case in January because of what he called circumstances beyond his and his client’s control.

The Reiners’ Legacy

With a career that spanned more than five decades, Rob Reiner made his mark on the film and television industry, defining multiple genres and acclaimed classics.



▲ Nick Reiner appears during his arraignment in Los Angeles County Superior Court on Feb. 23, 2026.

He rose to fame in the 1970s for his role as Meathead in the CBS sitcom “All in the Family,” before making his directorial debut with “This Is Spinal Tap” in 1984.

Throughout the ’80s and into the early ’90s, he cemented his legacy as a versatile director, bringing box office favorites such as “The Sure Thing,” “Stand By Me,” “The Princess Bride,” “When Harry Met Sally,” “Misery,” “A Few Good Men,” and others. He had 36 total award nominations and

24 wins, including Emmy awards for Best Supporting Actor in Comedy and Outstanding Continuing Performance by a Supporting Actor in a Comedy Series for “All in the Family.”

Michele Singer Reiner, also versatile in the business, was best known for her work as a photographer, film producer, and activist.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

EPA to Reform \$5 Billion ‘Clean School Bus’ Program

By Naveen Athrappully

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is revamping the Biden administration’s Clean School Bus (CSB) program, which focused on installing electric buses at U.S. schools, the agency said in a statement released on Feb. 19. The overhauled program will focus on providing school districts with “increased choice and affordable options” for school buses.

In 2021, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act directed the EPA to create the CSB program and provide \$5 billion over fiscal years 2022–2026 to replace existing school buses with zero-emission school buses. The Biden administration distributed about \$2.7 billion in these funds, 90 percent of which was to fund electric school buses. The rest went toward propane-fueled vehicles.

“There are multiple well-documented examples of one particular bus manufacturer failing to deliver buses altogether despite preemptively receiving tens of millions of tax dollars from the CSB program,” the EPA said.

“To fix these issues, the Trump EPA will seek public input on the availability, cost, and performance of alternative school bus fuels and technologies. This feedback will help reform the program to bring consumer choice back to schools and deliver results for American families, while still fulfilling congressional intent.”

The EPA cited the case of Lion Electric, a Canadian electric vehicle company that was granted \$159 million to build 435 battery-powered buses between October 2022 and May 2024.

However, Lion Electric filed for bankruptcy in December 2024. In August 2025, EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin said the company still hadn’t delivered



A row of school buses at Grand Blanc High School in Grand Blanc, Mich., on Sept. 30, 2025.

school buses to 55 districts, worth approximately \$95 million.

The Epoch Times reached out to Lion Electric for comment but did not receive a response by press time.

The Clean School Bus program has been a disaster of poor management and wasteful spending of taxpayer dollars.

EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin

In its latest statement, the EPA said it had issued a request for information that seeks feedback from school officials, fleet operators, energy producers, and manufacturers on a wide range of fuel options that can be used by school buses, including biofuel, hydrogen, liquefied natural gas, and compressed natural gas.

In 2023, almost 450,000 school buses were operating in the United States, the Department of Energy said, citing data from the World Resources Institute. As of July 2025, more than 5,100 electric school buses were serving roughly 265,000 students, the Electric School Bus Initiative said in a post published in July 2025.

Biden’s CSB Program

In a February 2023 EPA report submitted to Congress, the Biden administration highlighted the environmental requirement for the CSB program.

Most school buses emit nitrogen oxides and particulate matter in diesel exhaust, which contribute to poor air quality and negatively affect people’s health, especially children, who have a faster breathing rate than adults and whose lungs are not yet fully formed, the report said.

The agency’s CSB program funds the replacement of existing school buses with zero-emission and clean school buses, which will “ensure cleaner air for students, bus drivers, school staff working near bus loading areas, and the communities through which the buses drive each day,” according to the report.

Last year, a group of 17 Democrats in the U.S. Senate, along with Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), sent a letter to Zeldin regarding the EPA’s decision to freeze CSB program funds, according to a Feb. 28, 2025, statement from the office of Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.).

The lawmakers said that CSB funding would support the electric bus manufacturing boom in the United States and create good-paying jobs.

They said that CSB provided health and cost-saving benefits, and they urged the EPA to distribute funding for CSB program recipients with signed agreements, according to the statement.

In its latest statement, the EPA accused the previous administration of intentionally limiting the availability of these fuel options so it could push for electric buses.

“By providing more options to school districts, EPA will ensure they can purchase the right types of school buses for their specific needs,” the agency said.

The data collected from the request for information will be used to revamp the CSB program for the 2026 grant

funding round that prioritizes child safety and reliable buses, according to the EPA. The agency said that updating the program is expected to bring auto jobs back into the United States and unleash domestic energy production.

“The Clean School Bus program has been a disaster of poor management and wasteful spending of taxpayer dollars,” Zeldin said.

“At the Trump EPA, we have zero tolerance for reckless spending. Today, EPA takes the next step to set the program straight.

“Americans can rest assured that moving forward, the program will be safe, effective, and use reliable forms of American energy.”

According to the EPA, revamping the CSB program strengthens oversight and compliance actions in a way that aligns with President Donald Trump’s executive orders.

On Jan. 20, 2025, Trump signed the “Unleashing American Energy” executive order, which sought the removal of incentives for electric vehicles and promoted market choice for consumers.

In November 2024, the EPA’s Office of Inspector General released a report saying the agency didn’t have adequate oversight to record CSB program rebates for fiscal years 2023 and 2024.

“We found that the EPA failed to implement internal controls to make sure funding was properly allocated for the 2022 Clean School Bus Rebates Program,” the report said. “The Agency recorded the full amount paid to the Clean School Bus rebate recipients as an expense, instead of an advance, prior to the recipient expending the funds.”

Families Receive \$1.5 Million After Supreme Court Victory Over LGBT Storytelling

By Aaron Gifford

A Maryland school district that lost a recent U.S. Supreme Court case will pay \$1.5 million to parents who weren’t allowed to opt their children out of LGBT story time, the families’ attorneys said.

The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, which represented the plaintiffs in the landmark *Mahmoud v. Taylor* case, announced the settlement on Feb. 20. The defendant, the Montgomery County Board of Education—which oversees Montgomery County Public Schools,

the largest school district in the state—was also ordered to comply with court orders mandating advance notice and opt-out provisions.

“Public schools nationwide are on notice: running roughshod over parents’ rights and religious freedom isn’t just illegal—it’s costly,” Eric Baxter, Becket senior counsel and the lead attorney in the case, said in a Feb. 20 statement. “This settlement enforces the Supreme Court’s ruling and ensures parents, not government bureaucrats, have the final say in how their children are raised.”

The Feb. 19 order from Judge Deborah Boardman of the U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland did not specify the settlement amount but did say the plaintiffs are “entitled to reasonable attorney fees and costs” outlined in a separate agreement. Three families and “Kids First,” an unincorporated association of parents and teachers, are listed as the awardees.

The Supreme Court announced its 6–3 ruling on June 27, 2025, and directed the litigation of remaining issues, including any settlement, to continue in lower courts.

The case dates back to 2022, after a group of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish parents told the board of education that, for religious reasons, they wanted to remove their elementary school children from book readings about same-sex romances between young children, gender transitions, and pride parades. The parents were denied permission to do so, even though the district and the state have policies and laws allowing opt-outs and requiring advance notice of such materials.

The Supreme Court’s majority opinion, written by Justice Samuel Alito, stated that the government cannot condition the benefit of free public education on parents’ acceptance of instruction that threatens the religious beliefs and practices that parents choose to instill in their children.

Baxter said the court had ongoing jurisdiction over the district to ensure compliance.

“It took tremendous courage for these parents to stand up to the school board and take their case all the way to the Supreme Court,” Baxter said in a statement. “Their victory reshaped the law and en-

sured that generations of religious parents will be able to guide their children’s upbringing according to their faith.”

The Epoch Times reached out to Montgomery County Public Schools and its Board of Education for comment but received no response by press time.

After the Supreme Court ruling, the district expressed its disappointment and said it would analyze the decision and provide guidance ahead of the 2025–2026 academic year.

“This decision complicates our work creating a welcoming, inclusive, and equitable school system,” the district’s June 27 public statement said. “It also sends a chilling message to many valued members of our diverse community.”

Donald Daugherty, senior counsel for the Defense of Freedom Institute, said the district is complying with the Supreme Court decision. It provided families with refrigerator magnets noting what instruction was planned ahead of each semester, he told a House subcommittee on Feb. 10.

“I think that shows an incentive that you don’t want to be on the wrong side of that decision going forward,” he said.

FDA Unveils Plan for Quickening Development of Personalized Therapies

By Zachary Stieber

U.S. regulators on Feb. 23 formally unveiled a plan for speeding up the process of bringing drugs aimed at rare diseases to market.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in draft guidance stated that it is proposing to make it easier to secure approval of genome editing and ribonucleic acid-based therapies for rare genetic disorders, or conditions that affect fewer than 200,000 people in the country.

Because of the limited number of patients, it may not be feasible to carry out randomized, controlled trials, the typical practice of confirming whether therapies work, the officials said.

Alternative forms of evidence, such as responses to exposure as detected among biomarkers or in clinical outcomes, may be sufficient to win approval

for the drugs under the new pathway.

“This guidance is a critical step the FDA is taking to tailor our regulatory approach to patients with ultra-rare conditions,” Dr. Marty Makary, FDA commissioner, said in a statement. “It is our priority to remove barriers and exercise regulatory flexibility to encourage scientific advances and deliver more cures and meaningful treatments for patients suffering from rare diseases.”

Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said the move was an example of cutting unnecessary red tape.

Officials said they were inspired by researchers who appeared to cure a genetic disease in a baby called KJ by developing a custom editing therapy and administering it at about 7 months and 8 months of age.

“We realized we could do this over and over again,” Dr. Kiran Musunuru, director of the Penn Cardiovascular Institute’s

Genetic and Epigenetic Origins of Disease Program and one of the doctors who worked on the therapy, said at an event in Washington on Feb. 23.

Kennedy said during the event that the baby’s recovery was “a medical miracle” and that, after he heard about it, he directed the FDA to broaden the availability of such custom therapies.

“Every child facing rare genetic diseases deserves the kind of treatment that baby KJ got,” he said.

The FDA’s guidance will be published soon in the Federal Register at Regulations.gov. Upon publication, members of the public will have 60 days to submit comments on the proposed updated guidance.

The pathway was first discussed by Makary and Dr. Vinay Prasad, head of the FDA’s Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, in late 2025 in an article

they wrote for the *New England Journal of Medicine*. The officials at the time said they would consider clearing bespoke therapies if companies showed success with as few as several patients.

“An appropriately designed study with a small sample size can support licensure of a product for which pharmacologic effect is aligned with biologic plausibility and congruent with observed clinical outcomes,” they wrote at the time. “That philosophy, in essence, embodies the plausible mechanism pathway.”

In the draft guidance issued on Feb. 23, the FDA stated that the plan to quicken rare disease therapy development was jointly designed by the center headed by Prasad and the FDA’s Center for Drug Evaluation and Research, whose acting director is Dr. Tracy Beth Hoeg.

Hoeg said at the Feb. 23 event that officials hope that the change, if ultimately implemented, will result in the timeline for drugs developed for such conditions being “sped up dramatically.”

A transgender-themed children’s book in Irvine, Calif., on Aug. 30, 2022.



JOHN FREDRICKS/THE EPOCH TIMES

Finding Solutions to America’s Loneliness Epidemic

Continued from A1

book, “The Great Good Place,” to describe venues or locations where people can gather and socialize outside their “first” and “second” places: home and work.

But as the United States faces a growing loneliness epidemic, third places such as cafes, bars, churches, bowling alleys, barber and beauty shops, bookstores, and recreation centers are in decline nationwide, threatening to isolate Americans further, particularly as social media and smartphone addiction worsen the effects of loneliness.

“Third places are super important to not only people’s wellness, but to community wellness. It’s important to the economy,” D’Amico said.

“If you don’t have third places, and you don’t have places where people can gather—your parks, your coffee shops, and things like that—a city will inevitably die.”

D’Amico, who spends her days running her flower and art store, Kinspoke, which also hosts art events and activities in Bradenton, is not alone in her goal of building more third places within her city.

Maynard James Keenan—lead singer of the bands TOOL, A Perfect Circle, and Puscifer—recently opened the Queen B Vinyl Café in Cottonwood, Arizona, with his wife, Jennifer, to offer a welcoming third place for people of all ages to socialize and bond over vinyl records, coffee, creative food selections, wine from Keenan’s vineyard, and live music events.

“So far, everyone seems to be really appreciative and grateful to have the space, because we do try to be so welcoming to all ages,” Jennifer Keenan told The Epoch Times.

“The shows we’ve been holding with live music and movies and gaming nights have been really popular because we are one of the only all-ages venues in the area.”

The cafe also hosts art night, art club, and printing workshops, which have been popular with the younger crowd, she said.

“It’s kind of like they found their home,” Jennifer Keenan said. “And they are the kind of people that maybe when they first come in, and you start talking to them and invite them to something, it’s like, ‘Oh, I don’t really go out much.’ And then you start seeing them a little bit more and a little bit more and just kind of almost becomes like a little family.”

The disappearance of third places is directly linked to the U.S. loneliness epidemic, experts have said, and the trend is hurting Americans’ physical and mental health.

Now, community leaders such as D’Amico and Keenan are creating new spaces to forge community and pull Americans out of social isolation.

Loneliness Surges

The “loneliness epidemic” was highlighted by then-U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy in 2023, at the tail end of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Even when they couldn’t put their finger on the word ‘lonely,’ time and time again, people of all ages and socioeconomic backgrounds, from every corner of the country, would tell me, ‘I have to shoulder all of life’s burdens by myself,’ or ‘if I disappear tomorrow, no one will even notice,’” Murthy said.

The forced social isolation during the pandemic only worsened these impacts.

Psychologist Debra Kissen, founder and CEO of Light On Anxiety Treatment Centers, told The Epoch Times that during COVID-19, people weren’t forced every day to get exposures to the thing that “is difficult but good for them”: social interaction.

“A lot of people haven’t caught back up with going to in-person religious activities,” she said.

“[They’re] maybe still working out at home, if they used to work out at the gym. So it really did a lot of damage in terms of getting comfortable creating a life when you don’t really need to be around people.”

Murthy emphasized that isolation was already surging before 2020, citing research showing that roughly one in two adults reported experiencing loneliness years before the pandemic.

And although the pandemic ended, recent studies point to a worsening “loneliness epidemic.”

More than half of U.S. adults reported feeling isolated and “emotionally disconnected” from others, and roughly 62 percent cited “societal division as a significant source of stress in their lives,” according to a November 2025 survey from the American Psychological Association.

An even larger number of adults—69 percent—were craving more emotional support in the past year than what they received, a 4 percent increase from the



▲ Maynard James Keenan brews coffee at Queen B Vinyl Café, which he co-owns with his wife, Jennifer Keenan, in Cottonwood, Ariz., in August 2025.

If we look at studies of vitality and what helps with well-being, it’s engagement in community; it’s less time with just our thoughts.

Debra Kissen, psychologist, founder and CEO, Light On Anxiety Treatment Centers

previous year.

Gallup’s May 2025 survey found that younger American men are among the loneliest demographics in the developed world.

Males are also roughly four times more likely to kill themselves than females, based on the most recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Kissen said young men sometimes struggle to articulate their feelings of isolation and loneliness, particularly in therapy, often either expressing misanthropic ideas or showing signs of irritation or anger.

“It’s not, ‘I am isolated; I am lonely.’ It’s like: ‘The world is bad. ... People are bad,’” she said.

The loss of third places has amplified these emotions for many, according to Brent Woods, who runs Woods Counseling Services in Lake Charles, Louisiana.

Woods saw firsthand the effects of the disappearance of third places when Hurricane Laura devastated the city in 2020.

The storm sliced into Lake Charles as a Category 4 hurricane, flattening homes and businesses with howling winds and a catastrophic storm surge. It was the strongest hurricane to hit Southwest Louisiana since recordkeeping began in 1851.

“It completely destroyed us,” Woods told The Epoch Times.

“We lost a lot of third places here, and so I get clients that come in and just share a lot of discouragement with really nothing to do ... and the inability to be able to connect with other people.”

Although the pandemic accelerated the trend, third places have been waning much longer than the past six years, research shows.

More than a decade before COVID, the economic hardships brought on by the 2007–2009 Great Recession contributed to a sharp decrease in third places in countless communities nationwide, particularly independent coffee shops and grocery stores.

As online shopping began dominating and forced many brick-and-mortar stores out of business, third places declined further.

After analyzing the availability of third places across U.S. communities between 2010 and 2021, researchers found a significant downturn in all categories, including coffee shops, libraries, grocery stores, fast-food outlets, beauty and barber shops, art galleries, recreation and senior centers, and social organizations, according to a November 2025 study in Health and Place.



▲ Olivia D’Amico speaks during a panel interview at The Friendly City Art Club hosted at Oscura in Bradenton, Fla. The Friendly City Foundation is a nonprofit that hosts concerts, art clubs, festivals, and other community events.

Health Effects

When Murthy referred to America’s loneliness wave as an epidemic in 2023, he said the emotion goes beyond being a mere “bad feeling” for those who experience it.

He said loneliness leads to a “greater risk of cardiovascular disease, dementia, stroke, depression, anxiety, and premature death,” and the mortality rate of those experiencing social disconnection is similar to that of people who smoke 15 cigarettes a day.

Adults reporting high levels of loneliness were found to be significantly more likely to also experience chronic health issues—including depression, anxiety, and chronic pain—in the American Psychological Association’s survey late in 2025, in which high levels of loneliness were linked to premature mortality, poor sleep, and cognitive issues.

On the flip side, strong social connections are positively correlated with increased physical and mental health, including lower rates of depression, anxiety, and cardiovascular disease.

“If we look at studies of vitality and what helps with well-being, it’s engagement in community; it’s less time with just our thoughts,” Kissen said.

“When we’re engaged, the world is bigger than our tiny selves, and when we just kind of are recycling, considering our own situation, it’s not good for anyone. We humans are really meant to be pack animals.”

Finding Solutions

Despite the increase in loneliness nationwide—affecting both urban and rural communities—some of the solutions may already be within grasp.

Being able to see and diagnose “the social isolation loneliness epidemic, is [possible] because people are realizing they’re in pain,” Kissen said.

“With the pain comes change,” she said. “So many people are feeling that way and are actually talking to each other at bars and talking to each other at the line at Trader Joe’s that maybe five years ago weren’t.”

She likened the process to acclimating to swimming in cold water; while at first it may feel jarring and uncomfortable, a person’s brain will quickly adjust.

“If the thing that’s stopping you is that it feels so hard, it gets easier with repetition,” Kissen said.

Loneliness is also linked to time and frequency of social media use, according to a 2025 study published in Environmental Research and Public Health. Researchers determined that limiting screen time could help curb some of the technology’s negative effects, including feelings of isolation.

And there may be a solution with more lasting effects: building more third places, which, aside from fostering social interaction and community, also lead to increased entrepreneurship in individual communities, according to a 2024 study from Columbia Business School.

Samuel J. Abrams, a nonresident senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, reflected on the loss of third places in a December 2025 article.

He advocates prioritizing local ownership in zoning and permitting in towns and cities, lowering the barrier to entry for local entrepreneurs, and increasing funding for existing civic institutions such as libraries, parks, YMCAs, and recreation and community centers.

“The point is not to romanticize the past,” Abrams wrote. “It is to recognize that community is not an abstraction. It requires physical settings where people can show up, linger, and build familiarity over time.”

D’Amico similarly advocates local priority in zoning and planning, at both the city and county levels, in Southwest Florida.

“I would love to see a support of actual small businesses who are here,” she said, “because I think as we watch corporations move in, and there is a lot of development, a lot of that has gone towards these large corporations.”

Creative or collective industries—such as certain restaurants, artists or farm co-operatives, nonprofits, or worker-owned companies—“are the industries that actually will, in the future, be building the cities,” she said.

Oldenburg observed in 2023 that virtual spaces online are no replacement for the socialization people receive in real life, and D’Amico said she believes real third places are more important now than ever.

“I think it’s super important—even in the age of [artificial intelligence] and social media and all these different things—that we gather and we don’t think that those things can replace it,” she said.

69

PERCENT

According to a November 2025 survey from the American Psychological Association, 69 percent of adults wanted more emotional support in the past year, a 4 percent increase from the previous year.



Trump Signals Tariff Hikes for Countries That Fail to Honor Trade Deals

By Andrew Moran

President Donald Trump said on Feb. 23 that he may implement higher tariffs on countries that “play games” following last week’s Supreme Court ruling.

Over the weekend, the president rolled out a new round of tariff hikes, raising the temporary import duty on all foreign goods entering the United States to 15 percent from 10 percent.

But Trump suggested that nations choosing not to proceed with trade deals they agreed to could face higher tariff rates.

“Any Country that wants to ‘play games’ with the ridiculous Supreme Court decision, especially those that have ‘Ripped Off’ the U.S.A. for years, and even decades, will be met with a much higher Tariff, and worse, than that which they just recently agreed to,” he said in a Feb. 23 Truth Social post. “Buyer beware!”

The high court ruled 6–3 on Feb. 20 that some of the president’s global tariffs exceeded the authority granted by an emergency powers law passed by Congress.

Shortly after the decision, Trump told reporters that his administration would pursue alternatives to ensure that his trade agenda is implemented.

He signed an executive order invoking Sections 122 and 301 of the Trade Act of 1974 hours later, effectively imposing a 10 percent global tariff rate for 150 days.

Extending the levy will require congressional approval, although the president disputed this provision.

“As President, I do not have to go back to Congress to get approval of Tariffs,” Trump said on his social media platform.

“It has already been gotten, in many forms, a long time ago! They were also just reaffirmed by the ridiculous and poorly crafted Supreme Court decision!”

Earlier in the day, Trump continued criticizing the Supreme Court’s decision, calling it a “very internationally divisive ruling.”

U.S. stocks tanked after Trump’s latest Truth Social post.

The blue-chip Dow Jones Industrial Average fell by more than 600 points amid growing trade confusion.

The tech-driven Nasdaq composite index and the broader S&P 500 fell by about 0.6 percent.

State of Trade Deals

Questions have been raised about whether countries will stick to the agreements they established with the Trump administration over the past several months.

“So in places like Vietnam or India, are they going to keep their side of the arrangement that gives us much more



SAMIRA BOUAOU/THE EPOCH TIMES

As president, I do not have to go back to Congress to get approval of tariffs.

President Donald Trump

fair access to their markets and also the investments in the United States?” Arthur Laffer Jr., president of Laffer Tenger Investments, said in a note emailed to The Epoch Times.

U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer said no country has signaled plans to withdraw from these deals.

The bilateral pacts were not made on the premise of the Supreme Court’s ruling, he said in an interview with CBS’s “Face the Nation” on Feb. 22.

“We expect our partners to stand by them,” Greer said. “I haven’t heard anyone yet come to me and say, ‘The deal is off.’”

Foreign officials have reached out to the White House seeking clarity, according to Greer.

“They want to see how this plays out,” he said.

Countries have suggested that they will assess the high court’s decision and wait for more information.

The Chinese Ministry of Commerce said on Feb. 23 that it would perform a “comprehensive assessment,” noting that reciprocal tariffs violate U.S. and international laws.

Trump will make a three-day visit to China next month, the White House said last week.

The European Commission, in a weekend statement, said the bloc’s leaders would not accept higher U.S. tariffs.

“The commission will always ensure that the interests of the European Union are fully protected,” the European Commission said in a Feb. 21 statement.

“EU companies and exporters must have fair treatment, predictability, and legal certainty.”

“A deal is a deal. As the United States’ largest trading partner, the EU expects the U.S. to honour its commitments set out in the Joint Statement—just as the EU stands by its commitments.”

In July, the United States and the European Union reached a trade agreement that would ease tensions on both sides of the Atlantic and bolster market access for U.S. goods.

European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde, appearing on CBS’s “Face the Nation,” said it is essential for countries’ economic stability to have

Shipping containers at Port Liberty in Bayonne, N.J., on April 10, 2025.

greater “clarity” on the future of their trade relationships with the United States.

Given that this administration has concentrated on carrying out the president’s trade objectives, foreign governments may need to be careful about reneging on these deals, according to Laffer.

“This president is laser-focused on this agenda because it really is the pillar to the rest of his political agenda,” he said.

Until then, the United States is adapting to the new tariff rules.

Jacob Burg, Sam Dorman, and Aldgra Fredly contributed to this report.

MICHAEL M. SANTIAGO/GETTY IMAGES



Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange on Feb. 20, 2026.

US Military Says It Struck Another Drug Boat in Caribbean Sea, Killing 3

By Jack Phillips

The U.S. military said on Feb. 23 that it struck a drug boat in the Caribbean Sea, killing at least three alleged narco-terrorists in the latest strike on such vessels in recent weeks.

“[The military] conducted a lethal kinetic strike on a vessel operated by Designated Terrorist Organizations,” U.S. Southern Command said in a post on X, including a video of the incident.

Democratic lawmakers have questioned the overall legality of the strikes, as well as their effectiveness.

“Intelligence confirmed the vessel was transiting along known narco-trafficking routes in the Caribbean and was engaged in narco-trafficking operations.”

It is not clear which terrorist group the U.S. military was referring to in the post. Last year, a number of drug cartels, including the Sinaloa Cartel and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, and several gangs were designated as foreign terrorist organizations by the Trump administration.

No U.S. service members were injured in the mission, Southern Command said.

Starting in September 2025, the U.S. military has launched strikes targeting

drug smuggling boats in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean. The Trump administration has said that drug trafficking vessels pose a national security threat.

On Feb. 20, Southern Command said it carried out a strike on a drug smuggling vessel in the eastern Pacific, killing at least three people with no harm to U.S. personnel. Days before that, the military said it struck three drug boats in the eastern Pacific that left what it said were 11 suspected narco-terrorists dead.

President Donald Trump’s administration has said the United States is in “armed conflict” with cartels in Latin America and has justified the attacks as a necessary escalation to stem the flow of drugs.

“Although friendly foreign nations have made significant efforts to combat these organizations, suffering significant losses of life, these groups are now transnational and conduct ongoing attacks throughout the Western Hemisphere as organized cartels,” last year’s White House report reads.

“Therefore, the President determined these cartels are non-state armed groups, designated them as terrorist organizations, and determined that their actions constitute an armed attack against the United States.”

Democratic lawmakers have questioned the overall legality of the strikes, as well as their effectiveness, suggesting that the military does not have the legal justification to carry out airstrikes on drug vessels.

In September 2025, Sens. Adam Schiff



MARTIN BERNETTI / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

The USS Gravelly departs the Port of Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, on Oct. 30, 2025.

(D-Calif.) and Tim Kaine (D-Va.) introduced a measure calling for the cessation of U.S. strikes on the vessels because they were not carried out with the approval of Congress.

“Congress alone holds the power to declare war,” Schiff said as he announced the resolution. “And while we share with the executive branch the imperative of preventing and deterring drugs from reaching our shores, blowing up boats without any legal justification risks dragging the United States into another war and provoking unjustified hostilities against our own citizens.”

The strikes come as the Trump administration has built up a large U.S. military presence in the Caribbean that ultimately led to the capture in January 2026 of then-Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro. Maduro, who was captured in an American military raid in Venezuela, was taken to the United States to face drug trafficking charges, and he later pleaded not guilty.

It also comes as the Mexican government killed the head of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, Nemesio “El Mencho” Oseguera Cervantes, in an operation on Feb. 22, leading to cartel reprisal attacks.

EU Pauses US Trade Deal After Trump Announces 15 Percent Global Tariff

By Victoria Friedman

The European Parliament on Feb. 23 suspended the ratification process of the U.S.–European Union trade deal, after U.S. President Donald Trump announced a 15 percent global tariff following the Supreme Court’s decision to strike down his emergency tariffs.

Bernd Lange, chairman of the European Parliament’s International Trade Committee, said in a statement that the Feb. 20 ruling by the Supreme Court had implications for the proposed trade deal and that a “key instrument” used by the United States to initially strike the Turnberry Deal in Scotland in 2025 is “no longer available.”

“The situation is now more uncertain than ever,” Lange said. “This runs counter to the stability and predictability we sought to achieve with the Turnberry Deal.”

The Supreme Court last week invalidated the reciprocal tariff framework imposed by Trump under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, prompting the Trump administration to look at alternative legal avenues.

After the ruling, Trump announced a 10 percent global tariff under Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974 before increasing it to 15 percent on Feb. 21 following a detailed review of the court’s decision.

Lange said that Section 122 “applies indiscriminately to all countries exporting to the United States” and is imposed on top of the most favored nation rate.

“As a result, imports from the EU into the US would be subject to an applied rate exceeding the 15 percent threshold,” he said. “This, in itself, constitutes a clear departure from the terms of the Turnberry Deal.”

The deal requires approval by EU governments and the European Parliament, which comprises elected representatives from each of the 27 EU member states.

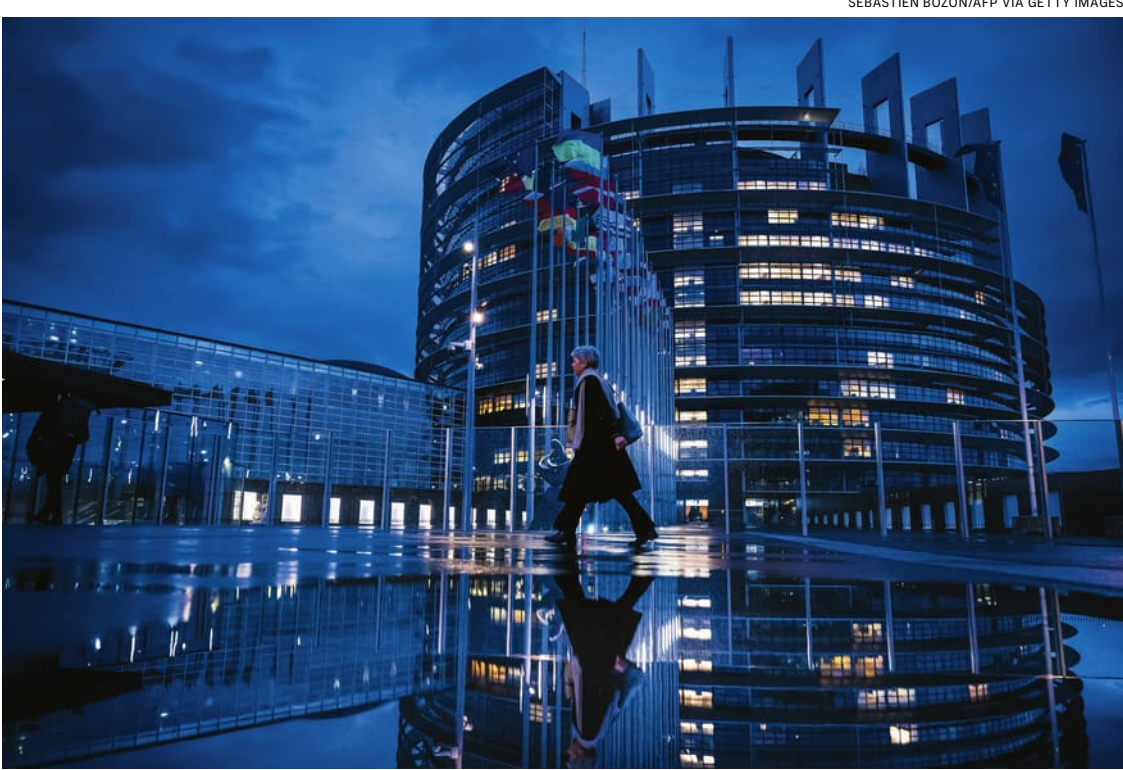
European leaders called Trump’s tariff threats over Greenland unacceptable and previously signaled they would be seen as problematic.

It was scheduled to be voted on by the European Parliament on Feb. 24.

“Shadow rapporteurs, representing a majority of Members, have agreed that under the current circumstances work on the two Turnberry files should be put on hold until clarity, stability, and legal certainty in EU–US trade relations are re-established,” Lange said.

“Consequently, the scheduled votes in committee tomorrow will not take place as planned, and the shadow rapporteurs will reassess the situation next week.”

The Turnberry Deal—reached as a



▲ A person walks by the European Parliament building in Strasbourg, France, on Dec. 19, 2024.

political agreement in July 2025 and later detailed in an August 2025 joint statement announcing an EU–U.S. Framework Agreement—would have suspended tariffs on all U.S. industrial goods and established tariff-rate quotas for a large number of U.S. agri-food products entering the EU.

At the time, both sides described the deal as a reset for the world’s largest bilateral economic relationship, valued at more than \$1.6 trillion a year.

Trump wrote on Truth Social on Feb. 23: “Any Country that wants to ‘play games’ with the ridiculous supreme court decision, especially those that have ‘Ripped Off’ the U.S.A. for years, and even decades, will be met with a much higher Tariff, and worse, than that which they just recently agreed to. BUYER BEWARE!!!”

Trump has previously accused the EU of taking advantage of the United States in trade.

2nd Deal Ratification Delay

This is the second time that the European Parliament has paused ratification of the deal.

The first occurred on Jan. 21, after Trump said he would impose additional

tariffs on eight European countries that opposed the United States’ acquisition of Greenland, an autonomous territory within the Kingdom of Denmark, an EU member state.

Trump has said the United States needs Greenland for national security reasons and that a U.S. acquisition of the Arctic island is crucial to counteracting potential threats from Russia and China.

European leaders had called Trump’s tariff threats over Greenland unacceptable and previously signaled they would be seen as problematic for the EU–U.S. trade agreement.

Trump later canceled the tariffs after holding talks with NATO.

The tariffs would have gone into effect on Feb. 1 and would have affected the UK and EU member states Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden.

The Epoch Times contacted the White House and Office of the United States Trade Representative for comment but did not receive a response by press time.

Aldgra Fredly, Tom Ozimek, and Reuters contributed to this report.

Oman Says 3rd Round of Talks Between US, Iran to Take Place Thursday

By Chris Summers

Omani Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi said on Feb. 22 that the United States and Iran would hold a third round of talks about Tehran’s nuclear program in Geneva, Switzerland.

The first round of talks was held in Oman on Feb. 6. Albusaidi said the next round would take place on Feb. 26, “with a positive push to go the extra mile towards finalizing the deal.”

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said in a Feb. 22 post on X that his country is committed to peace and stability in the region.

“Recent negotiations involved the exchange of practical proposals and yielded encouraging signals,” he said. “However, we continue to closely monitor U.S. actions and have made all necessary preparations for any potential scenario.”

Iran has repeatedly claimed that it is not seeking to create a nuclear weapon and only wants to use the technology for an atomic energy program.

The United States, Israel, the UK, and the European Union have all derided that claim and insist that Iran curtail

its uranium enrichment program.

U.S. President Donald Trump’s special envoy Steve Witkoff, who is leading the U.S. negotiating team, said on Feb. 21 that Trump was surprised that Iran had not conceded to the demands of the international community.

“I don’t want to use the word ‘frustrated,’ because he understands he has plenty of alternatives, but he’s curious as to why they haven’t ... I don’t want to use the word ‘capitulated,’ but why they haven’t capitulated,” Witkoff said during an interview with Fox News.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi responded to Witkoff’s comments in a post on X, saying: “Curious to know why we do not capitulate? Because we are Iranian.”

Trump warned on Feb. 19 that a “meaningful deal” must be reached or “bad things” would happen.

On Jan. 28, Trump said he had dispatched a “massive armada” headed by the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln to the waters of the Middle East. Trump told reporters on Feb. 13 that a second U.S. carrier strike group was ready to sail for the Middle East.

On Feb. 20, according to reports, naval observers spotted elements of the USS Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group transiting the Strait of Gibraltar, at the mouth of the Mediterranean Sea, heading east toward the Suez Canal. Aboard were four squadrons of F/A-18 Super Hornets and a squadron of E/A-18G Growlers.

Curious to know why we do not capitulate? Because we are Iranian.

Abbas Araghchi, Iranian foreign minister

Araghchi said on Feb. 17 that the two countries “were able to reach a general understanding on a set of guiding principles” after a second round of talks in Geneva.

During a Fox News interview on Feb. 17, U.S. Vice President JD Vance said Trump had set some red lines that the Iranians were “not yet willing to actually acknowledge.”



▲ Omani Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr Albusaidi addresses the U.N. General Assembly in New York City on Sept. 27, 2025.

“The United States has certain red lines,” Vance said. “Our primary interest here is we don’t want Iran to get a nuclear weapon. We don’t want nuclear proliferation. If Iran gets a nuclear weapon, there are a lot of other regimes, some friendly, some not so friendly, who would get nuclear weapons after them.”

Ryan Morgan and Reuters contributed to this report.

US Orders Nonessential Personnel Back From Embassy in Lebanon

By Ryan Morgan & Emel Akan

The U.S. State Department has ordered the withdrawal of nonessential personnel from the U.S. embassy in Lebanon amid heightened security concerns.

“We continuously assess the security environment, and based on our latest review, we determined it prudent to reduce our footprint to essential personnel,” a senior State Department official told The Epoch Times on Feb. 23.

While the State Department official did not specify the security concerns that prompted the staff drawdown at the embassy in Beirut, the move comes amid mounting tensions between the United States and Iran.

For weeks, U.S. forces have been amassing across the Middle East, as

U.S. President Donald Trump has called on Tehran to submit to new security constraints. The president has threatened military action if no deal is reached, and Iranian officials have warned that they could respond in ways that would spread the conflict across the Middle East.

Tehran has historically partnered with and supported Hezbollah, a designated terrorist group based in Lebanon.

The State Department official who spoke to The Epoch Times described the latest security precautions as “a temporary measure intended to ensure the safety of our personnel while maintaining our ability to operate and assist U.S. citizens.”

For now, the State Department official said the embassy in Beirut remains

operational with its core staff.

Trump has ordered two U.S. carrier strike groups to the Middle East. In recent weeks, dozens of U.S. warplanes and aerial refueling aircraft have also gathered at airbases across the region.

Speaking to a gathering of world leaders on Feb. 19, Trump noted the June 2025 U.S. strikes on Iran and said, “We may have to take it a step further.”

“You’re going to be finding out over the next probably 10 days,” Trump added during his Feb. 19 remarks.

In an interview with CBS News on Feb. 22, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei could approve a set of terms for a potential deal with the United States this week. Araghchi said he anticipates being ready to pres-

ent the terms at a round of talks in Geneva, Switzerland, on Feb. 26.

Lebanon has long been a venue for heightened regional tensions.

After the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attack on southern Israel, Hezbollah began launching rockets and drones at parts of northern Israel and contested areas along the Israeli–Lebanese–Syrian border, fueling cross-border skirmishes.

Israeli forces intensified attacks targeting Hezbollah leadership ahead of a ground assault into southern Lebanon in October 2024. Then-President Joe Biden’s administration brokered a ceasefire for Israel and Lebanon in November 2024, but Israeli forces have maintained a presence in southern Lebanon and have continued to conduct strikes on Hezbollah suspects.

Beijing Uses Fake Western News Sites to Attack Falun Gong, Report Finds

Continued from A1

This tactic fits into the broader campaign waged by Beijing against the Falun Gong diaspora overseas, according to Levi Browde, executive director of the Falun Dafa Information Center, a nonprofit that monitors the CCP’s persecution of Falun Gong.

“This is not simply online disinformation. The campaign we see today is a blueprint for how a hostile influence operation run by Beijing can launder propaganda through fake ‘news’ brands and then use coordinated inauthentic accounts to push it into Western information ecosystems,” Browde said in a statement.

The CCP set out to eradicate Falun Gong, also known as Falun Dafa, in 1999 after government surveys revealed that between 70 million and 100 million Chinese had adopted the practice, which consists of slow-moving exercises and spiritual teachings based on the tenets of truthfulness, compassion, and forbearance.

In a 2022 secret meeting, CCP leader Xi Jinping chastised his cadres for failing to crush Falun Gong, especially in the United States, where its practitioners have founded a number of successful companies that expose the CCP’s atrocities. The Epoch Times previously reported based on whistleblower information.

At the meeting, Xi ordered a new campaign that would focus on using Western media, social media, and U.S. legal institutions against companies started by Falun Gong practitioners.

The campaign has consistently targeted Shen Yun Performing Arts, a premier classical Chinese dance and music company founded in 2006. The company has long faced attacks and sabotage attempts, often involving Chinese consular officials pressuring theaters and local officials to cancel its shows.

The new campaign, however, uses

Shen Yun Performing Arts’ curtain call in Daegu, South Korea, on Feb. 18, 2026.



KIM GUK-HWAN/THE EPOCH TIMES



SAMIRA BOUAOU/THE EPOCH TIMES

Falun Gong practitioners take part in a Chinese New Year parade in New York City on Feb. 21, 2026.

new tactics. Dozens of articles with a negative slant against Shen Yun have popped up in U.S. media. A lineup of social media influencers, joined by thousands of fake social media accounts, have amplified these articles online. Meanwhile, the company has received fake bomb threats at many venues on its tour.

The fake news sites discovered by Graphika are part of a new chapter in the campaign, Browde said.

“When malign actors spoof trusted outlets and amplify smear narratives through coordinated networks, it destabilizes public trust and can help legitimize transnational repression,” he said.

“It can also help recruit unwitting allies in the West by inflaming sentiments

based on false narratives to disparage Falun Gong and Shen Yun. This is literally how the CCP shapes the thoughts and feelings of Americans.”

The fake news sites were created between 2020 and 2025 by various Chinese public relations and marketing companies. They usually publish a mix of content scraped from Chinese state-run media as well as articles designed to promote China and Chinese commercial products. Since 2023 or earlier, at least 10 such sites have been used to post anti-Falun Gong content, according to the report.

“The anti-Falun Gong content was likely placed on behalf of a covert actor, possibly one aligned with the [People’s Republic of China],” it reads.

Links to two of the anti-Falun Gong articles were repeatedly posted on social media by dozens of accounts seemingly associated with the CCP’s “Spamouflage” influence campaign, according to the report.

“The X accounts and Facebook pages demonstrated signs of inauthenticity similar to Spamouflage accounts, including using likely randomly generated usernames and stock profile pictures, having almost no following and followers, criticizing Falun Gong and Shen Yun, and posting identical content simultaneously,” it states.

When malign actors spoof trusted outlets, ... it destabilizes public trust and can help legitimize transnational repression.

Levi Browde, executive director, Falun Dafa Information Center

The cybersecurity community has long been aware that the CCP uses fake news sites operated by private companies to spread its propaganda. In 2022, Google-owned cybersecurity firm Mandiant discovered more than 70 such fake media outlets. Multiple cybersecurity outfits then built upon that research, discovering a network of hundreds of sites with the capability to quickly deploy content around the world, as if centrally coordinated, according to an October 2025 report from the French Ministry of Armed Forces’ Institute for Strategic Research.

“The scope of this network, the similarity of disseminated content despite local adaptations, and the numerous revealed interactions between entities suggest strong capabilities for penetrating foreign audiences,” the October 2025 report reads.



SCREENSHOT BY THE EPOCH TIMES

Supposed news sites identified by Graphika as controlled by Chinese entities.

Eileen Gu’s Return to the Olympics Renews Concerns Over China’s Athlete Naturalization Program

Continued from A1

naturalized athletes appears in China’s men’s ice hockey team. Several players born and trained in Canada, the United States, and Russia competed for China’s team at the 2022 Beijing Olympics after obtaining Chinese citizenship, according to Olympic rosters.

At the time, the Chinese Olympic Committee did not publish detailed explanations of how citizenship issues were resolved. China does not recognize dual citizenship under its Nationality Law, and any person applying for naturalization must not retain foreign nationality.

Questions about whether athletes renounced previous passports were not publicly clarified by authorities. Gu has avoided addressing her citizenship situation and has never explained how she circumvented China’s Nationality Law.

Diverging Paths

The contrast between Gu and American figure skater Alysa Liu, who represented the United States at the same Olympics, underscores the political symbolism of national identity in sport.

While Liu competed under the American flag, Gu’s decision to compete for China drew scrutiny in the United States.

Enes Kanter Freedom, a former NBA player known for his human rights

activism, wrote in a post on X on Feb. 10 that Gu is a “traitor.”

“She was born in America, raised in America, lives in America, and chose to compete against her own country for the worst human rights abuser on the planet, China,” he wrote.

“She built her fame in a free country, then chose to represent an authoritarian regime while cashing in on endorsements linked by watchdog groups to mass detention and forced labor camps.”

Gu’s commercial appeal in China is apparent. In December 2025, Forbes ranked her fourth among the world’s highest-paid female athletes, earning a total of \$23.1 million behind tennis stars Coco Gauff, Aryna Sabalenka, and Iga Swiatek.

Yet some other naturalized athletes received less fanfare. Chinese media outlets reported that three naturalized athletes are expected to leave the Chinese Olympic Team after this year’s tournament because they either did not win any medals or failed to qualify. Very few of those naturalized athletes enjoy the celebrity status that Gu does.

In Liu’s case, she and her father, Arthur Liu, who fled China in the 1990s because of his involvement in the 1989 Tiananmen Square pro-democracy protests, rejected China’s recruitment attempts.

“Obviously, it will be impossible for me to allow my daughter to compete on behalf of the Chinese government when the Chinese government is still abusing the basic human rights of the Chinese people,” Arthur Liu told “China in Focus,” a program of NTD, a sister media outlet of The Epoch Times, from Milan on Feb. 18.

Now living in California’s Bay Area, Arthur Liu has continued to raise concerns about human rights violations in China. He said the FBI had reached out to him, warning that Beijing was spying on him and advising him to remain vigilant and exercise caution.

Underperforming Athletes

Currently, multiple naturalized athletes in China are receiving harsh criticism on social media for their poor performance. Notably, Chinese state media outlets are openly covering the widespread online criticism.

Beverly Zhu, a figure skater born in Los Angeles, changed her name to Zhu Li and switched to representing China in 2018. Chinese media outlets reported that she faced a wave of online attacks after underperforming at the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. Many Chinese netizens questioned the motivation for her naturalization and accused her of expressing “fake patriotism” toward



A Chinese passport.

OMAR HAVANA/GETTY IMAGES

China to achieve celebrity status as a patriotic athlete who abandoned the United States for China.

This year, in short-track speed skating, South Korean-born Lin Xiaojun and Hungarian-born Liu Shaoang both failed to win any medals for China.

A Chinese sports analyst criticized the strategy of using naturalized athletes in state-controlled media outlet NetEase.

Another Chinese state-controlled media outlet, iFeng, said on Feb. 22 that the Chinese short-track speed skating team’s performance at the Games was its worst showing in 31 years. However, the report has since been deleted from its webpage.

Currently, Gu remains one of China’s most recognizable naturalized athletes. However, the mixed results of others, along with unresolved questions about citizenship and loyalty, suggest that Beijing’s bid to fast-track athletic prestige through imported talent may carry political and reputational risks beyond the medal count.

MILLO MORAVSKI/AGENCE ZOOM/GETTY IMAGES



(L-R) Eileen Gu of Team China takes second place, Megan Oldham of Team Canada takes first place, and Flora Tabanelli of Team Italy takes third place in the women’s freestyle skiing big air competition at the 2026 Winter Olympics in Livigno, Italy, on Feb. 16, 2026.

Hong Kong Court Rejects Appeals, Keeps 12 Activists in Prison in Subversion Case

By Frank Fang

A Hong Kong court on Feb. 23 upheld the prison sentences and convictions of 12 pro-democracy activists, rejecting their appeals in a national security case that has drawn international attention as freedoms in the city continue to erode.

The appeal stems from the high-profile “Hong Kong 47” case, in which 47 opposition figures were arrested in 2021 and charged with conspiracy to commit subversion. After lengthy court proceedings, 45 of those activists were sentenced to between four and 10 years in November 2024, and two others were acquitted. The case drew international criticism from rights groups and from some countries, including the United States, the UK, and Canada.

The subversion charge relates to their participation in and organization of unofficial primary elections in mid-2020 to pick the strongest candidates for a legislative council election. The elections coincided with the anti-Chinese Communist Party (CCP), pro-democracy movement of 2019 and 2020, which started when millions took to the streets of Hong Kong in June 2019.

Eleven democrats lost their appeals against their convictions. They included former lawmakers Helena Wong, Lam Cheuk-ting, Raymond Chan, and “Long Hair” Leung Kwok-hung; former district councilors Clarisse Yeung, Calvin Ho, and Tat Cheng; and activists Gwyneth Ho, Owen Chow, Winnie Yu, and Gordon Ng.

The democrats—with the exception of Ho, who only appealed her conviction—and one other activist, Prince Wong, also failed in their appeals against their sentences.

Additionally, Hong Kong’s Department of Justice lost its appeal against Lawrence Lau, a former district councilor who was one of the two acquitted in the “Hong Kong 47” case.

Three Court of Appeal judges—Jeremy Poon, Anthea Pang, and Derek Pang—wrote in their Feb. 23 judgment that the defendants were part of a conspiracy “conceived, advocated, and pursued” by legal scholar Benny Tai to engineer a “constitutional mass destruction weapon” with the goal of “toppling the constitutional order” in Hong Kong.

Tai, who was one of the defendants in the case, was sentenced to 10 years in prison in November 2024.

Leung’s wife, Chan Po-ying, an activist who was not connected with the case, said



▲ Police stand guard outside the West Kowloon Magistrates’ Courts as 12 pro-democracy activists appeal their convictions and sentences, in Hong Kong on Feb. 23, 2026.

the court’s decision was not grounded in the facts. She argued that the defendants’ actions were consistent with Hong Kong’s mini-constitution, the Basic Law.

“It already presumed these people had intended to subvert the state’s power,” she said.

Amnesty International Hong Kong overseas spokesperson Fernando Cheung said in a Feb. 23 statement that the ruling “underlines the grave state of human rights” in the former British colony.

“None of these 12 defendants committed an internationally recognized crime; they have been serving lengthy sentences simply for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association, and participation in public affairs,” Cheung said.

“By failing to overturn these wrongful convictions and sentences today, the court has missed a critical opportunity to correct this mass injustice.”

“Peaceful opposition to a government is not a crime,” Cheung added, before urging that all remaining jailed activists in the case should be “released immediately and unconditionally.”

Currently, 18 of the 45 people convicted

in the case have been released after completing their prison sentences. Among them were former district councilors Lester Shum and Jimmy Sham.

None of these 12 defendants committed an internationally recognized crime.

Fernando Cheung, spokesperson, Amnesty International

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong said in a statement that she was “deeply concerned” that Ng, an Australian citizen, had lost his appeal. Wong added that the Australian government has “expressed [its] strong objections to Chinese and Hong Kong authorities on the continuing broad application of national security legislation.”

“The Australian Government will continue to advocate at senior levels in support of Mr Ng’s best interests and welfare

and has sought consular access to Mr Ng,” Wong said in the statement.

To quell the street protests from 2019 to 2020, the CCP bypassed Hong Kong’s legislature and on June 30, 2020, imposed a national security law on the city, which punishes vaguely defined crimes such as secession and subversion with a maximum penalty of life imprisonment.

In March 2024, the Hong Kong government further tightened control on the city after passing a sweeping new national security law known as Article 23. The law targets political crimes such as treason and insurrection, which may be punished by life imprisonment.

In another national security case, Jimmy Lai, a former Hong Kong media mogul and outspoken critic of China’s communist regime, was sentenced to 20 years in prison in early February.

Lai’s sentence drew international condemnation, including from the United States, the UK, the European Union, Australia, and Taiwan.

The Associated Press and Reuters contributed to this report.



▲ People outside a Sam’s Club store in Miami on July 7, 2025.

Chinese National Found Guilty in Gift Card Fraud of More Than \$2 Million

By Frank Fang

A Chinese national has been found guilty in federal court in Albany, New York, of conspiring to launder money through a scheme in which he redeemed more than \$2 million in gift cards purchased by fraud victims.

Wang Jun, 63, a lawful U.S. permanent resident, redeemed about \$2.29 million in Walmart and Sam’s Club stores in Florida between June 2019 and June 2021, after receiving card information from coconspirators overseas, the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Northern District of New York announced on Feb. 18.

Wang, indicted in September 2024 on one count of conspiracy to launder monetary instruments, is scheduled to be sentenced on June 16. According to the U.S.

Attorney’s Office, he faces up to 20 years in prison, a fine of up to \$500,000, and three years of supervised release.

“Wang was a knowing and essential player in a calculated, international scheme that preyed on victims, including the elderly, throughout the United States,” First Assistant U.S. Attorney John A. Sarcione III, for the Northern District of New York, said in a statement.

“We will tirelessly pursue and hold accountable individuals involved in every level of these fraud schemes. There is no safe harbor for those who profit from exploiting vulnerable Americans.”

According to a court document filed by prosecutors in December 2025, the scheme targeted victims who through telephone fraud schemes were duped into purchasing gift cards and provided the

card numbers and PINs to fraudsters, who then passed the information on to Wang.

During a two-year period, Wang went to a total of 140 Walmart and Sam’s Club stores in Orlando and surrounding areas.

To avoid raising suspicions and conceal the volume of his gift card redemptions, Wang “often redeemed gift cards to buy new gift cards at multiple registers in the same store on the same day” and “regularly visited multiple Walmart/Sam’s Club stores on the same day to do such transactions,” according to the court document.

“Sometimes, the defendant spent hours on the same day going from store to store to redeem gift cards, often redeeming gift cards within minutes of when they were purchased out of state by fraud victims,” the court document reads.

Judge Mae Avila D’Agostino of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of New York, in a memorandum decision and order issued on Feb. 12, detailed how several victims were defrauded.

One of the victims, identified only as “C.W.,” received a call in June 2019 from someone who told her that her computer had a problem and that she needed to buy gift cards to resolve the issue. The victim then bought a \$500 gift card and gave the card’s information to the caller.

Another victim, identified only as “A.M.,” after being duped by an online babysitting job offer, sent an alleged couple \$1,300 in gift card information in June 2019.

In September 2020, a victim identified as “Y.M.” purchased gift cards after a caller

claimed that blood and drugs had been found in a car rented in her name.

Prosecutors said that a secretly recorded conversation between Wang and an FBI agent showed the defendant was aware of the fraud scheme, as he made remarks such as “The only loser is the lady,” “We all know. Easy to know. Only this lady lost \$1,000,” and “Other than this lady, everybody’s happy,” according to the judge’s ruling.

Wang also admitted to the FBI agent that he “was sent information from someone in China with gift card numbers and he would go to stores like Walmart in the United States,” according to the judge’s memorandum.

Prosecutors also found evidence that Wang did not work alone in the United States. According to the judge’s ruling, Wang instructed a contact on “how to redeem gift cards at Walmart” and described his activity to a recruit as “daily work like a regular job.”

“Defendant’s conduct is sufficient for the Court to find beyond a reasonable doubt that he conspired to launder monetary instruments, even if the evidence is circumstantial,” the judge wrote in her ruling.

“Mr. Wang was part of an international scheme that stole millions from hardworking Americans across the country and right here at home,” Craig L. Tremaroli, special agent in charge of the FBI’s Albany Field Office, said in a statement.

In response to an email inquiry from The Epoch Times on Feb. 20, Wang’s attorney, Nicolas Hurtado, stated, “Mr. Wang maintains his innocence, and the conviction will be appealed.”

Mr. Wang was part of an international scheme that stole millions from hardworking Americans across the country.

Craig L. Tremaroli, special agent in charge, FBI Albany Field Office

China Is the Real Militarist in Indo-Pacific: Analysts

By Jarvis Lim

China is using accusations that Japan seeks to “revive militarism” to mask its own military aggression, which is gravely threatening Indo-Pacific security, experts warn.

Beijing is ramping up efforts to alter the current geopolitical landscape in the region, Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said on Feb. 20.

“China is intensifying its attempts to unilaterally change the status quo by force or coercion in the East China Sea and the South China Sea, while also expanding and stepping up its military activities in the areas surrounding our country,” Takaichi told the Diet, Japan’s parliament.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi criticized Japan again at the Munich Security Conference in Germany on Feb. 14 over Takaichi’s earlier position on Taiwan, claiming that Tokyo was seeking to “revive militarism.”

Japan’s Foreign Ministry called the accusations “factually incorrect and baseless” in a statement, and Tokyo has lodged a formal diplomatic protest with China.

Relations between the two neighbors have plummeted to their lowest point in decades after Beijing reacted furiously to Takaichi’s November 2025 remarks that a military assault on Taiwan could directly imperil Japan’s own survival.

The Real Militarist

Robert Eldridge, director of North Asia for the Global Risk Mitigation Foundation in Hawaii, said Wang’s comments were “laughable,” and he characterized the remarks as either completely divorced from reality or a forced recitation of falsehoods.

“His comments are masking China’s intentions and actions. It is called projection,” Eldridge told The Epoch Times.

Grant Newsham, a retired U.S. Marine officer and former U.S. diplomat, concurred, characterizing Wang’s remarks as empty posturing designed solely to generate noise and attract international attention.

“The regular cries of ‘Japanese milita-



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

ALEXANDRA BEIER/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



▲ Chinese ships patrol as the People's Liberation Army conducts military drills on Pingtan island—the closest point to Taiwan—in Fujian Province, China, on Dec. 30, 2025.

rism’ are a standard feature of Chinese government propaganda whenever Japan makes a prudent effort to improve its defenses or does something China doesn’t like,” Newsham told The Epoch Times.

He said that typically the Japanese themselves would “moderate” whatever they were planning to do to keep China quiet, but the Takaichi administration and most of Japan no longer feel any need to accommodate Beijing.

“While China raises the specter of an aggressive, militarily powerful Japan—which is a lie—it has built up a powerful military that can dominate the Asia region and seize other nations’ territory,” Newsham said.

The Chinese military expansion, he said, continues with an eye toward “global domination.”

“So the real threat of militarism comes from China—not Japan,” Newsham said. “And keep in mind that China has no enemies that warranted such a buildup.”

China’s Ambitions

Newsham said that Chinese Navy ships, along with the Chinese Coast Guard, the maritime militia, and the Chinese fishing fleet functioning as an adjunct of the military, are operating in multiple maritime regions across the Indo-Pacific, threatening regional stability.

“The Chinese military and paramilitary presence is so large that the Chinese effectively have de facto control of the South China Sea ... and also other maritime territory that other countries claim,” he said.

Newsham said the Philippines, a key

claimant state in the South China Sea dispute, has specifically been on the receiving end of Chinese aggression for a long time.

“[China] is now tightening its grip on Philippine maritime territory at places like Scarborough Shoal,” Newsham said.

In addition, he warned that Beijing is currently using threatening aerial maneuvers as rehearsals for a potential invasion of Taiwan—a self-governed democracy that has never been ruled by the Chinese Communist Party but that Beijing has vowed to annex by force if necessary.

“The Chinese Air Force is also conducting threatening patrols against Taiwan,” Newsham said. “Over the last several years, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) has conducted joint training and exercises all around Taiwan.”

He said that Japan is simultaneously facing similar maritime and aerial threats from Beijing.

“PLA has also launched missiles that landed in Japanese waters. The Japanese face constant harassment from Chinese Navy ships and Chinese Air Force fighters and bombers,” Newsham said.

“The Chinese military [has] been developed specifically to dominate the region and take other peoples’ territory.”

China ‘Wants a Fight’

Kei Koga, an associate professor at the School of Social Sciences at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, said that although China’s strategic posture is not fundamentally new, its implementation now centers on exploiting Taiwan as a wedge to disrupt the broader regional order.

“In this context, the anticipated U.S.–China summit in April is likely to be a critical juncture that will signal the future direction of this [U.S.–China–Taiwan] triangular relationship,” Koga told The Epoch Times.

Koga said a military conflict over Taiwan would not be contained locally but would trigger a fundamental shift in the entire regional balance of power.

“It would generate new patterns of alignment and realignment and produce far-reaching strategic consequences for the postwar regional order,” he said.

Newsham said the peril to this regional order stems directly from a proactive desire to initiate conflict.

“If peace is threatened in the Indo-Pacific, it is because China threatens the peace and wants a fight.”

Newsham said Beijing frames its approach to neighboring countries, including Taiwan, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, and Australia, in ways that leave them little room for compromise.

“So you do whatever China tells you to do—or else fight back,” Newsham said.

He said the burden now falls on Washington to honor its security commitments in the Indo-Pacific and stand by its allies, implying that any retreat would leave the door open for Beijing to fill the void.

“The United States is also having to make a similar choice: defend your position in the Indo-Pacific and protect your friends as you’ve promised to do—and that means fighting—or else slink back, humiliated, to the U.S. mainland,” he said.

China’s AI Robot Spectacle Masks Harsh Commercial Realities, Experts Say

By Michael Zhuang

Chinese state TV’s 2026 Lunar New Year Gala opened on Feb. 16 with a futuristic flourish: Humanoid robots somersaulted, danced, and struck martial arts poses under bright lights during the Year of the Horse celebration. To many viewers, the message was unmistakable. China’s humanoid robots had arrived, and might even be outpacing global competitors.

State media and officials quickly amplified that narrative. A spokesperson for China’s foreign ministry, Lin Jian, said in a post on X that Chinese humanoid robots had once again stunned audiences after debuting the previous year. Domestic headlines hailed another technological triumph.

Away from the spectacle, industry observers and experts offered a different assessment, saying that what audiences saw was not autonomous intelligence conquering the future, but rather carefully scripted demonstrations refined through months of rehearsal.

Zhang Tianliang, a current affairs commentator and contributor to NTD, a sister media outlet of The Epoch Times, said on his Chinese-language podcast that a nationally televised program such as the Lunar New Year Gala is subject to strict review by the regime’s propaganda authorities.

The coordinated appearance of multiple robotics firms was unlikely to be a spontaneous artistic choice, but rather reflected high-level political signaling, suggesting that the robotics industry is being positioned as a strategic priority for future state support, he said.

Stage Built for Perfection

The four Chinese companies featured in this year’s gala—Unitree Robotics, Noetix, Galbot, and MagicLab—represent a new wave of Chinese humanoid

startups racing to commercialize embodied artificial intelligence (AI), according to Chinese state media outlet Xinhua News Agency. Embodied AI refers to AI systems that can physically interact with the world through technology such as robots.

Although the humanoid robots’ performances included backflips, coordinated dance routines, and martial arts, the feats took place in what engineers call a highly structured environment, consisting of flat floors, fixed lighting, pre-programmed choreography, and human operators offstage.

Chinese media outlet The Beijing News reported that some teams rehearsed for three months, running hundreds of software iterations and millions—even hundreds of millions—of simulations before appearing on stage for just a few minutes.

Frank Tian Xie, a business professor at the University of South Carolina–Aiken, told The Epoch Times that some of the robots were operated via human remote control rather than by fully autonomous AI.

“As a result, such demonstrations are more promotional in nature and may not accurately reflect the underlying technical capabilities,” he said.

Chinese media outlet The Beijing Daily reported that one company reconstructed a one-to-one replica of the gala stage inside an empty factory, marking the floor with one-square-meter grids to ensure that a robot’s backflip landed precisely within its assigned box. Engineers updated motion strategies more than 300 times to eliminate deviation, according to Chinese web portal 163.com. In other words, what viewers saw was the robot’s best take, not its everyday performance.

In December 2024, a Unitree Robotics H1 humanoid robot fell and appeared to convulse at a trade show in Nanjing,



JADE GAO/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

according to Chinese media reports. Behind it, a large screen displayed promotional footage of the same robot leaping and climbing stairs.

In April 2025, a Unitree G1, the same model later showcased at the 2026 gala, fell during a robot half-marathon event, according to China’s Sina news portal. In another race, a Unitree H1 collided with a human operator during a remote-control handoff, according to Chinese finance outlet Yicai.

Footage circulating online showed that each robot was shadowed by a backstage operator carrying a controller, prompting online critics to compare the devices to high-end puppets rather than independent machines.

Commercialization Problem

The technical challenges extend beyond balance and choreography.

Unlike large language models trained on internet-scale text, robots must gather real-world interaction data to learn manipulation, navigation, and coordination. That data remains scarce and expensive.

At the World Economic Forum in Davos in January, Turing Award winner Yann André LeCun said no company has yet made humanoid robots truly practical. Robots today, he said, possess less common sense than a cat.

He pointed out that while robots can

▲ Xpeng’s humanoid robot speaks to reporters in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, China, on Nov. 5, 2025.

be trained to perform highly specific, narrowly defined tasks, doing so requires collecting vast amounts of data, which is an expensive and time-consuming process, and the resulting systems are typically capable of handling only a limited range of functions.

Tech billionaire Elon Musk has also tempered expectations about embodied AI. Speaking in Davos, he said Tesla’s Optimus humanoid robot currently performs only simple factory tasks, although he expects more complex industrial applications later this year.

In China, Utech Robotics is the country’s only publicly listed humanoid robotics firm. It has partnerships with major manufacturers and aims to scale production. Its Walker S2 robots currently perform limited tasks such as box stacking and quality inspection, according to Chinese financial outlet Yicai. Switching functions often requires human intervention.

China’s own state-controlled media reports suggest that the Lunar New Year Gala appearance was about more than celebration.

Each participating company paid up to 100 million yuan (about \$14.5 million) for the partnership, effectively purchasing national exposure.

Chinese tech news outlet TMTPost said that for startups chasing IPOs or new financing rounds, the gala provides validation of technical stability, proof of large-scale coordination, and invaluable branding, according to a Sina-hosted article.

China accounted for more than half of global industrial robot installations in 2024, most of which involved traditional robotic arms, not humanoids, the International Federation of Robotics said in its World Robotics 2025 report.

Song Tang contributed to this report.



EU Urges US to Honor Terms of Trade Deal After Supreme Court Ruling

By Aldgra Fredly

The European Commission stated on Feb. 22 that it wants “full clarity” from the United States after a Supreme Court ruling invalidated U.S. President Donald Trump’s tariffs. It asked that Washington honor a trade deal reached last year.

The Trump administration has been looking at alternative legal avenues after the Supreme Court on Feb. 20 struck down the reciprocal tariff framework imposed by Trump under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act.

Following the ruling, Trump announced a 10 percent global tariff under Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974 before increasing it to 15 percent on Feb. 21 following a detailed review of the court’s decision.

The European Commission issued a statement on Feb. 22 urging the U.S. government to provide clarity on its next steps, saying that the current situation is “not conducive to delivering fair, balanced, and mutually beneficial” transatlantic trade and investment as agreed to by both sides last year.

Under a trade agreement reached in July 2025, the United States agreed to cap tariffs on most European Union imports to 15 percent, covering a range of sectors such as cars, pharmaceuticals, semiconductors, and lumber.

In return, the EU agreed to eliminate tariffs on all U.S. industrial goods and grant preferential market access to U.S. seafood and agricultural exports. It also agreed to increase purchases of military and defense equipment from the United States.

“A deal is a deal. As the United States’ largest trading partner, the EU expects the U.S. to honour its commitments set out in the Joint Statement—just as the EU stands by its commitments,” the European Commission stated on Feb. 22.

“In particular, EU products must continue to benefit from the most competi-



◀ Cranes tower above container ships at the Port of Los Angeles on Feb. 20, 2026.

tive treatment, with no increases in tariffs beyond the clear and all-inclusive ceiling previously agreed.”

According to a joint statement issued by the White House in August 2025, the trade deal reflects the EU’s determination to resolve U.S. concerns regarding trade imbalances and a shared commitment to leverage the “full potential” of their economies.

According to the EU, the joint statement outlined a U.S. tariff regime with “a clear maximum, all-inclusive, tariff rate of 15% for the vast majority of EU exports.”

The commission stated that it has been in continuous contact with the Trump administration regarding the matter, noting that EU Trade Commissioner Maros Sefcovic had spoken with U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer and Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick on Feb. 21.

“We will continue to work towards lowering tariffs, as provided for in the Joint Statement,” it stated. “The EU’s priority is to preserve a stable, predictable transatlan-

We were going to have tariffs, the president’s policy was going to continue.

Jamieson Greer, U.S. trade representative

tic trading environment, while also acting as a global anchor for rules-based trade.”

Greer confirmed in a CBS News interview on Feb. 22 that he had discussed tariff issues with his EU counterpart and officials from other countries and said that Washington expects its trading partners to stand by the deals.

“The deals were not premised on whether or not the emergency tariff litigation would rise or fall,” he said. “But rest assured, I’ve been speaking to these folks as well, and I’ve been telling them for a year, whether this case—whether we won or

lost—Whether we won or lost, we were going to have tariffs.

“That’s why they signed these deals even while the litigation was pending.”

Greer said on Feb. 20 that the Supreme Court ruling affected only Trump’s reciprocal and fentanyl-related tariffs, and extensive tariffs imposed under other statutory authorities will remain in place.

He said his office will launch new investigations under Section 301 of the Trade Act, covering most major trading partners.

The probe intends to counter “unjustifiable, unreasonable, discriminatory, and burdensome acts, policies, and practices.” Further tariffs may be applied if unfair practices are found, he said.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent has also cited Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act as an option the Trump administration is considering for its tariff policies following the Supreme Court ruling.

Jacob Burg contributed to this report.

Germany’s Christian Democratic Union Backs Social Media Ban for Those Younger Than 14

By Victoria Friedman

Germany’s governing Christian Democratic Union (CDU) passed a motion at its party conference on Feb. 21 to ban social media for those younger than 14 and introduce stricter digital verification checks for teenagers.

The CDU, led by German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, also called for fines against social media networks that fail to enforce those age limits, as well as backing harmonization of social media age limits across the European Union’s 27 member states.

“We call on the federal government to introduce a legal age limit of 14 for the use of social networks and to address the special need for protection in the digital sphere up to the age of 16,” reads the motion passed at the conference in Stuttgart.

Merz’s coalition partners, the Social Democratic Party (SDP), also back curbs on social media use for minors.

SPD Secretary-General Tim Klüssendorf welcomed the CDU adopting the motion, telling Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland on Feb. 22: “We finally need clear rules for digital platforms. Addiction-enhancing algorithms, hate speech, and bullying pose a massive problem for our entire society and can be particularly dangerous and harmful to children and young people.”

Last week, a group of SDP lawmakers and state politicians signed a discussion paper calling for social platforms to block access to children younger than 14 and to create special youth versions for 14- to 16-year-olds that do not have algorithm-driven feeds or functions such as infinite scrolling or autoplay.

Pressure from both parties in the coalition makes it increasingly likely that the federal government will push for a law on restrictions. However, Germany’s federal system assigns media regulation to the states, meaning that states must negotiate to reach nationwide rules.

The Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU), the regional sister party of the national CDU, criticized the move.

Alexander Hoffmann, who leads the CSU in the Bundestag, told the Augsburg Allgemeine on Feb. 22 that children will not learn how to use social media responsibly through restrictions.

“This debate about banning these platforms is out of touch with reality,” Hoffmann told the newspaper.

Australia’s Ban

In 2025, Australia became the first country to introduce a law restricting minors’ access to social platforms.

Taking effect on Dec. 10, 2025, the ban requires social media platforms to take reasonable steps to prevent those younger than 16 from accessing or signing up for accounts on their websites.

Companies failing in this regard face fines of up to AU\$49.5 million (US\$35 million).



Since the law came into force, Facebook, Instagram, Kick, Reddit, Snapchat, Threads, TikTok, Twitch, X, and YouTube are now age-restricted platforms in Australia.

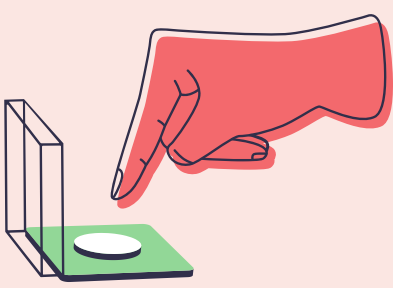
Since then, several countries in Europe and around the world have said they are considering similar measures, including France, Denmark, Malaysia, and Egypt.

Several of those governments have cited concerns over the addictive nature of social media and the effect it has on children’s mental health.

Reuters contributed to this report.



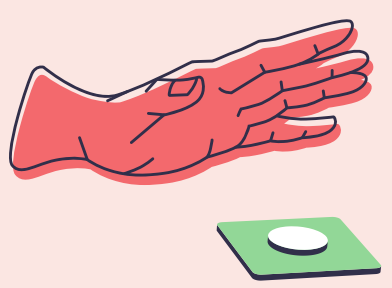
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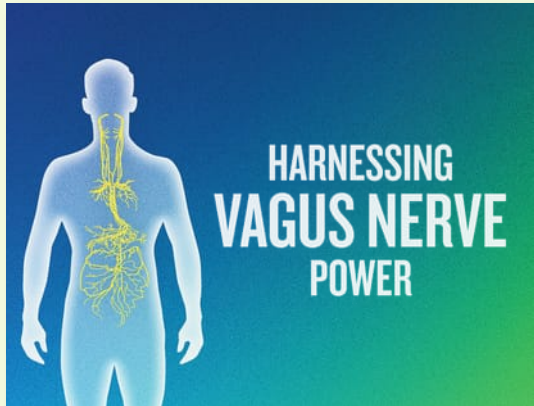
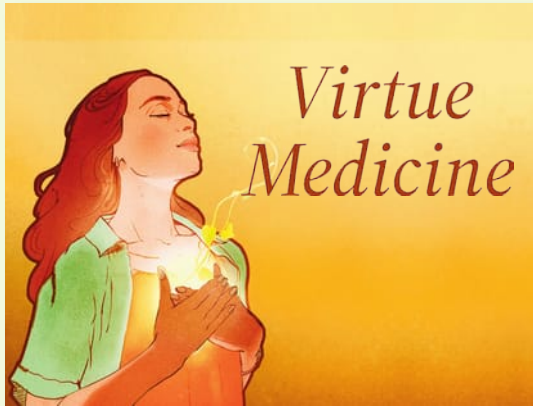
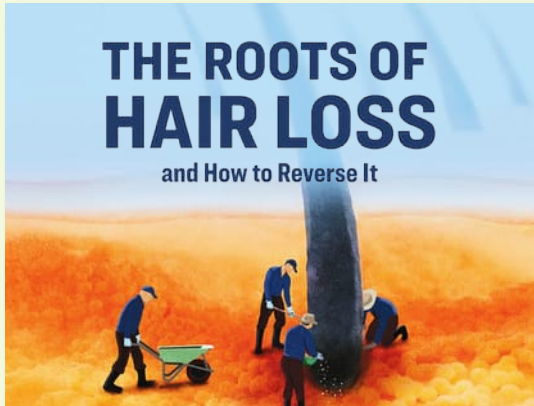
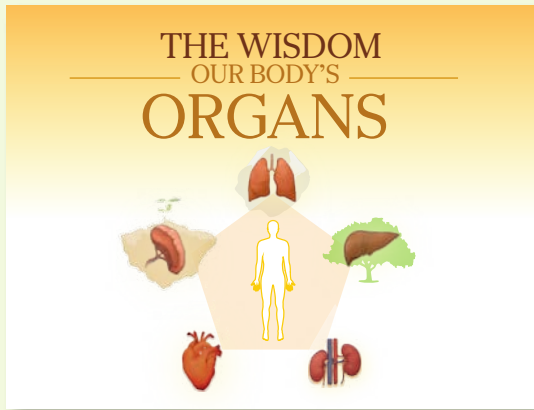
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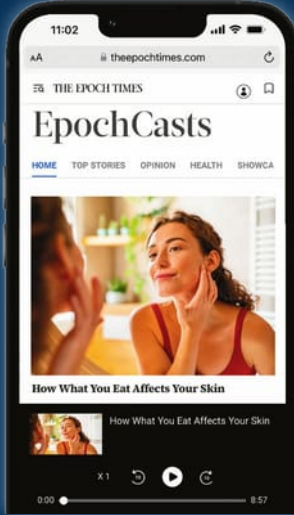
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China's Potemkin Generals
By Tamuz Itai | A18

Opinion

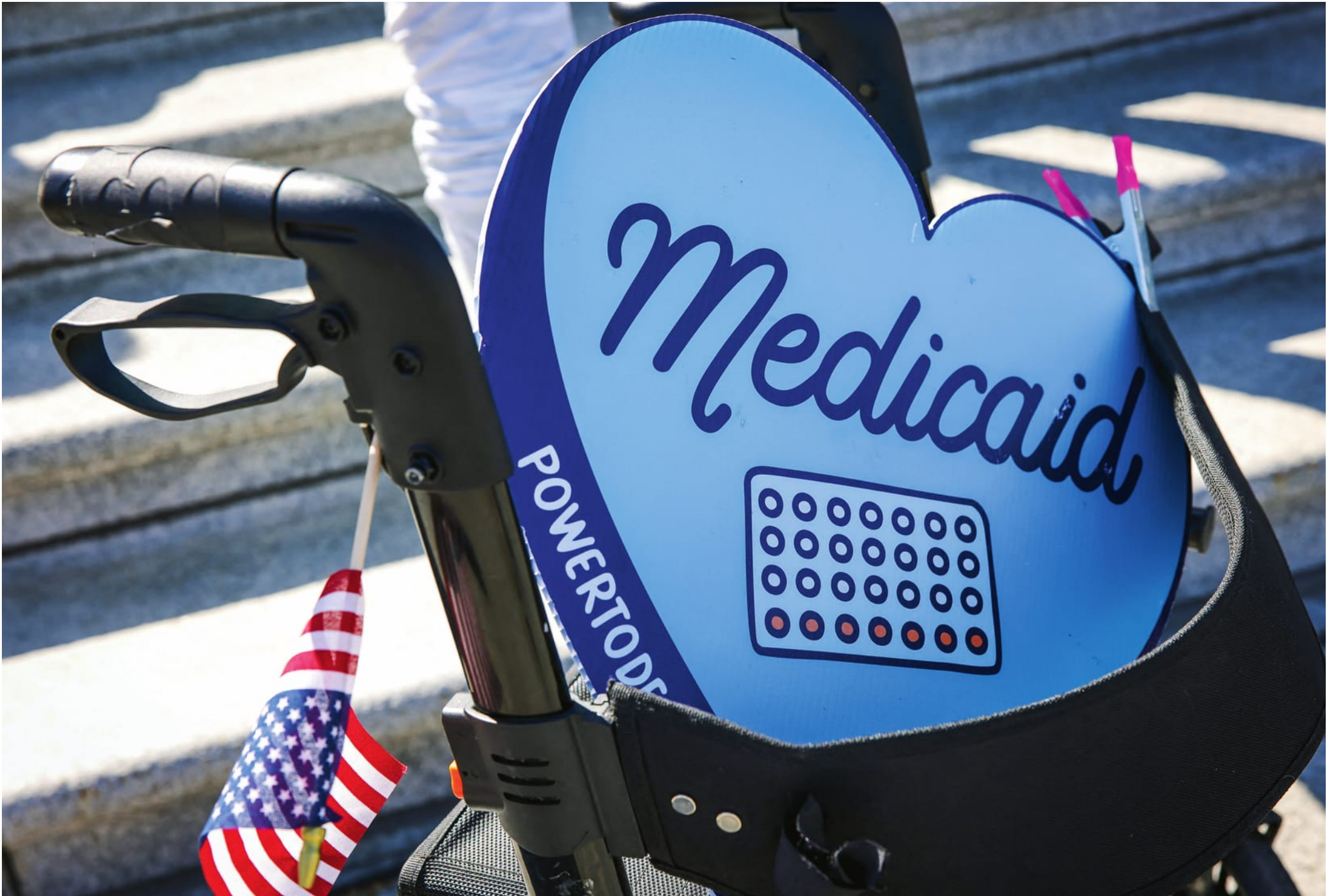
THE EPOCH TIMES

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When a Society Stops Wanting Children
By Mollie Engelhart | A19

BRYAN DOZIER/MIDDLE EAST IMAGES/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



▲ A sign in support of Medicaid rests in a walking device during a sit-in protest against a Republican budget plan on the House steps of the U.S. Capitol on April 27, 2025.

The Crowdsourcing of Waste and Fraud

By Jeffrey A. Tucker



The Trump administration came into office with a pledge to uproot waste, fraud, and abuse within the government's system of transfer payments. Leading the charge would be Elon Musk and his Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE).

They began their work early on, in earnest and with passion, starting inauguration evening, with many long days and nights of data crunching and number slinging, under the assumption that auditing the government would be similar to auditing a private company.

DOGE quickly found itself buried and overwhelmed. There were too many programs, too much leakage, no coordination between departments, strange sources of incoming and outgoing payments, shadowy institutions and names flying everywhere, and eye-popping levels of inefficiency. It became obvious that many decades had gone by without any scrupulous concern for how taxpayer dollars were used.

After months on the job, DOGE backed away from the big picture job and embedded itself in specific agencies with more focus and less in the way of press releases. Musk went back to his enterprises, which had been suffering because of his absence and distractions. Meanwhile, his small cadre of data mavens stayed on and got to work, agency by agency.

This much became clear: The job was too much for them. They had to prioritize their work. It was decided that the most important priority would be to sync up the many random databases strewn here and there and everywhere into large packages that were manageable and could be checked, with lines of spending matching sources and purposes. Nothing like this existed before.

Once that was done, it became clear that the datasets were too large for a team of workers. They needed to open source all the data and enlist help from the public. In essence, the problems were just too big to isolate problem spending from legitimate spending. The decision was made to bundle it all up and do waves of file dumps on the public.

After all, we live in the age of the citi-

zen researcher, people with fast internet connections, large machines, high degrees of skill, and a passion to discover. For too long, the affairs of government have lived in a cloud of secrecy, probably for 100 years or more. The excuse has always been discretion: It wasn't the public's business how the money was spent. But this is ridiculous; we are talking about taxpayer dollars. The citizens do, in fact, have the right to know. The goal of bringing all this out into the open would represent a fundamental change in the operation of public policy.

The most elaborate installation yet was just posted on the website of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), with a focus on Medicaid. This is a program designed to provide needed services to the poor. Annual spending exceeds \$1 trillion per year, having entered into new upward slopes of spending in the COVID era, when the government unleashed the printing presses and spent money as if it were in infinite supply. This one program now accounts for 18 percent of U.S. health care expenditures.

The goal of bringing all this out into the open would represent a fundamental change in the operation of public policy.

Exactly where is all this going? We now have a tool that helps show what is happening. HHS has provided a full ZIP file that anyone can download and examine. Nothing like this has ever happened in the history of the U.S. government or probably any government. It has also given us sample visualizations to help citizens understand the fullness of what is going on.

This effort has also involved Scott Bessent at the Treasury Department. He has announced that anyone who can find fraud and submit the evidence to the website will be given 10 percent to 30 percent of the fines imposed on the receiving individual or organization. This means giving rewards to intrepid re-

searchers who can find and prove fraud in the program. The efforts will take months or years, simply because there is so much of it.

Musk and others have given low estimates of 5 percent to 10 percent of fraudulent Medicaid spending over the past 10 years, while others say the number is closer to between 20 percent and 30 percent. Figures such as \$1 trillion are being thrown around as possible numbers on how much has been lost. They could be much higher. As we discovered in the Minnesota case, the fraud can be brazen and undisguised, or it can be surreptitious and shape-shifting in order to avoid detection.

There are many features of this effort that are fascinating. To my knowledge, this is the first time that a strategy such as this has been deployed to clear up the welfare state. It's probably the largest data dump by the government in history. The strategy of enlisting citizen researchers is also new and very brilliant, recalling bounty hunters of the Old West. People are talented and care deeply. Why not use that energy to clean up public spending?

The single most striking feature of this data release is that it was covered nowhere in the mainstream press. You might have thought otherwise—that the nation's press would be all over this—but not so. I kept looking for the headlines, but they were nowhere to be seen apart from The Epoch Times, Townhall, and a few other venues. There is no question that mainstream media is quite anxious to bury the news. If not for Musk's X and The Epoch Times, hardly anyone would even know about this!

What's most fascinating about this is what it reveals about the politics and culture of major media operations. You might think that even left-liberals would be on board with rooting out corruption and abuse within government programs, if only to shore up public confidence in their operations. But, again, as we saw in Minnesota, the dedication from elite circles to silencing all public knowledge of how their money is actually being used seems to be an essential part of their messaging priorities. As a result, one of the most spectacular moves in history to clean up the operations of government

has gotten almost no attention outside alternative venues.

In the bigger picture, the challenge that the Trump administration took on is larger and grander than anyone knew. The second term hit following the largest explosion of government spending ever recorded, with some \$6 trillion to \$8 trillion added in the name of public health in a few short years. Overall, total cumulative spending added across the years 2020 to 2025 totals roughly \$33 trillion to \$34 trillion.

For too long, the affairs of government have lived in a cloud of secrecy. The citizens do, in fact, have the right to know.

I'm profoundly aware that no human mind can even conceive of numbers on that scale. They are simply incomprehensible. Remember too that the government has no resources of its own; whatever it has to spend is taken from the public in one form or another: taxes, inflation, or debt paid by future generations. In essence, what we have seen over these years has set new records for profligacy.

I noted that after the first few months of DOGE's work in 2025, a kind of demoralization set in. The problem they had sworn to tackle was just too big for even a great team of researchers. DOGE and the Trump administration deserve maximum credit for their persistence and for coming up with a plausible strategy for achieving the goal. It's a start, in any case, and sets a mighty precedent for the future.

Jeffrey A. Tucker is the founder and president of the Brownstone Institute and the author of many thousands of articles in the scholarly and popular press, as well as 10 books in five languages, most recently "Liberty or Lockdown." He is also the editor of "The Best of Ludwig von Mises." He writes a daily column on economics for The Epoch Times and speaks widely on the topics of economics, technology, social philosophy, and culture.



▲ Military delegates arrive at the opening session of the National People's Congress in Beijing on March 5, 2025.

China’s Potemkin Generals

By Tamuz Itai



In the opaque corridors of Zhongnanhai, loyalty has always been a primary currency. But as of January, even that currency appears to have suffered a devaluation. The recent investigations into Gen. Zhang Youxia, the senior vice chairman of the Central Military Commission, and Liu Zhenli, the People’s Liberation Army’s top operational mind, represent more than just another anti-corruption drive. They signal the final stage of a decade-long “vertical coup” that has hollowed out one of the world’s largest militaries, at the very moment its commander-in-chief demands it be ready for war.

The Architecture of Isolation
To understand the current purge, one must look back to the structural “flinch” of the Hu Jintao era. Hu faced a party so rot-filled that it seemed unreformable without dissolution—a risk he was unwilling to take. He prioritized consensus, resulting in a “Decade of Stagnation” in which power leaked to local fiefdoms and corruption became the system’s fuel. Chinese Communist Party leader Xi Jinping inherited this bind but charged in the opposite direction. Since 2012, he has framed centralization as the only antidote to a Soviet-style collapse. Initially viewed as a reformer, he alienated hard-liners. However, around 2018, this pragmatism hardened into what can only be described as “abstract Communism”—a state of perpetual ideological struggle in which professionalism is viewed as a form of hidden betrayal. By now, reformers were disillusioned, and although hard-liners could identify ideologically, they remained wary because Xi had targeted them recently. By purging his own handpicked “war

Cabinet”—a group that was seven-strong in 2022 and is now reduced to just Xi and a single disciplinary enforcer—Xi has successfully created a “faction of one.” He has traded the seeming stability of collective leadership for absolute silence.

The Malicious Compliance Trap
The primary risk of such absolute power is not just paranoia, but sensory deprivation. When reporting bad news is conflated with disloyalty, the bureaucracy defaults to a “Potemkin” mode of reporting. This institutionalized lying is a direct legacy of the SARS and COVID-19 cover-ups, during which officials learned that reality must always be edited to suit the “core.” In the military, this has manifested as “malicious compliance.” Mid-level officers follow Xi’s radical ideological orders so rigidly that they effectively sabotage combat power. They purge experienced technicians to prove their “red” credentials, leaving advanced hardware in the hands of political loyalists who cannot operate it. Recent revelations of systemic failure—missile fuel tanks filled with water and silo lids that do not function—are the natural result of this environment. Commanders are not necessarily treasonous; they are simply surviving. In a system in which a beautiful lie is the only path to promotion, the military that Xi sees on his dashboard could be a work of fiction.

The Miscalculation Risk
This brings the Taiwan question into a dangerous new phase. Rationally, an invasion is suicidal. China faces a “closing window” of demographic decline, an arming of the First Island Chain led by Japan and the Philippines, and a United States that has authorized record-breaking asymmetric defense packages for Taipei. In case of invasion, fence-sitting countries would be forced into a binary

choice, and perhaps not many would choose to be the next meal of a ravenous Chinese Communist Party. However, rationality requires accurate data and clear eyes. The ghost of the Hamas miscalculation on Oct. 7, 2023, looms large here. Like the leaders in Gaza who believed their own narrative of an imploding enemy, Xi may mistake regional arms buildup as a bluff and “gray-zone” successes as proof of dominance. If Xi’s filtered reports tell him that the United States is a paper tiger and the People’s Liberation Army is “purified” and ready, he may pull a trigger that is not actually connected to a functioning gun. The paradox of 2026 is that China is perhaps becoming more dangerous externally precisely because it is becoming more dysfunctional internally. In “The Prince,” Niccolò Machiavelli, who was not known for excessive charity, offered a timeless warning on the “loyalty trap” that currently haunts the Chinese high command:

“There is no other way of guarding oneself from flatterers except letting men

understand that to tell you the truth does not offend you; but when everyone may tell you the truth, respect for you abates.”

To solve this, Machiavelli argues a wise leader must choose a few trusted men and give them “the liberty of speaking the truth to him.” This does not seem to be the advice that Xi has heeded.

Conclusion: Clinging to the Stake
There is a Chinese folk proverb about a thief who pulls out a wooden stake while the other thief leads away the donkey that was tied to the stake. Xi’s predecessors—Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu—took the “prizes” of absolute power and growth but left behind the systemic flaws of inequality, unspeakable acts, declining demographics, and an unreformable structure. Xi is now the one left clinging desperately to the stake—the fading tether of absolute Party authority. He refuses to let go, convinced that tighter control is the only way to avoid the day of reckoning. But when that day arrives, he will be the only one standing there to pay for the accumulated crimes of the system.

Tamuz Itai is a journalist and columnist who lives in Tel Aviv, Israel.



▲ Chinese soldiers march during a military parade in Beijing on Sept. 3, 2025.

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When a Society Stops Wanting Children

By Mollie Engelhart



On our ranch in Texas, the animals live natural, good lives. Our cows graze in an open pasture. Our pigs root and wallow. Our chickens scratch in the dirt and dust bathe in the sun. Birth is not forced or mechanized. It is seasonal and visible. Calves hit the ground in the early morning light. Piglets squeal and scramble toward their mothers. Hens settle into nests.

Life strains forward. Even outside of ranches like mine, in systems I strongly disagree with, biology still pushes toward continuation. Cows in consolidated feedlots still cycle and conceive. Sows confined to small gestation crates still carry litters. Chickens in tight cages still lay an egg nearly every day. The conditions may be far from ideal, but reproduction persists.

In mammals, fertility typically only shuts down under extreme stress, starvation, disease, or severe toxicity. When it does stop, it signals that something is deeply wrong in the environment.

That is why I cannot ignore what is happening in human society.

Across much of the developed world, birth rates have fallen below replacement level. Testosterone levels are declining. Sperm counts have dropped dramatically over the past half-century. Fertility clinics are full.

In 2023, more than 1 million abortions were reported in the United States, according to the Guttmacher Institute. Each year, roughly half a million vasectomies are performed. These are not fringe numbers. They reflect decisions being made at scale about whether the next generation will exist.

Beyond biological challenges, many men and women are simply opting out of parenthood altogether.

When fertility declines across an entire culture, biologically and psychologically, we should be just as attentive.

That is historically unusual. I have felt this shift personally. When I announced that I was pregnant with my third child, strangers on social media felt entitled to express their disappointment. They reminded me that I cared about the environment. They asked how I could call myself environmentally conscious and have more than two children. When I shared that I was expecting my fourth, a family member told me that I needed another child like I needed a hole in the head.

I have watched people online declare that if someone begins talking about her children, her pregnancy, or her married life, that is an immediate unfollow.

What is so threatening about celebrating life?

Some argue that having children should not be your greatest accomplishment. They say that it is ridiculous, that it is not an accomplishment at all. If you could go back and listen to me 20 years ago, I might have



▲ A mother and daughter in Washington on May 7, 2025.

said something similar. I measured success in ambition, visibility, and achievement.

But that perspective often comes from people who have not carried a child, have not labored through birth, have not surrendered sleep, ego, comfort, and personal plans for the sake of a family. There is a difference between dismissing something and having lived it.

I do not believe that having children is my greatest accomplishment in the same way that building a business was. Starting over from nothing, working 18-hour days, following the Lord when it did not align with my plans, pushing through seasons that felt like life and death, that required willpower. That was one kind of accomplishment.

Motherhood is another kind entirely. It is not an accomplishment in the sense of conquest. It is an accomplishment in the sense of surrender. It is a sacrifice. It is being reshaped by love. It is participating in the miracle of bringing a soul into the world. There is nothing casual about that.

I am 47 years old, and every month when I get my cycle, there is still a small flicker of disappointment. There is nothing more magical than feeling your body create life.

Yet we now live in a culture that treats that desire as optional at best and embarrassing at worst.

There is a popular social media personality known as Zoomie Komi, often called the girl with the list. She has built a following of millions of people by speaking openly about avoiding pregnancy. To be fair to her, she says she is not against mothers. She says she is against the expectation that women must become mothers and the circumstances in which some women feel pressured into it.

She is likable. She is funny. She is articulate. I started watching her content while researching this piece and lost 20 minutes of my life without realizing it. She is compelling.

And if I am honest, there is a younger version of me in her: the Los Angeles ver-

sion, successful, confident, slightly smug, and certain that I understood things I had not yet lived.

I do not agree with her conclusions. But I understand the appeal.

An entire brand can now be built around resisting pregnancy. Around framing motherhood as something to escape. That alone tells us something about the cultural moment we are in.

Part of this story is biological. We are awash in endocrine-disrupting chemicals. Plastics, pesticides, ultra-processed foods, chronic stress, sleep disruption, and metabolic dysfunction all affect hormones. Rising rates of polycystic ovary syndrome, thyroid disease, endometriosis, obesity, and low testosterone make conception more difficult for many couples. Some desperately want children and cannot have them. That reality deserves compassion and serious attention.

In nature, reproduction slows only when survival is threatened. In humans, it can also slow when hope is.

But there is another layer: meaning. Humans do not reproduce on instinct alone. We reproduce within narratives. If a society tells its young people repeatedly that human beings are a burden, that children are carbon emitters, that motherhood derails ambition, that fatherhood is optional, and that the future is bleak, those messages take root.

Environmental discourse has often framed humanity itself as the problem. The most responsible choice, some argue, is to have fewer or no children. Young women are encouraged to prioritize career first

and fertility later, if at all. Young men are told that traditional provider roles are outdated. Housing costs soar. Child care is expensive. Communities fragment.

When people do not feel economically secure, socially supported, or hopeful about the future, they hesitate to bring children into it.

On the ranch, life operates in cycles. Birth, growth, death, renewal. Calves stand within hours. Piglets jostle for milk. Chicks break through shells and begin scratching for food. The drive toward continuation is woven into creation itself.

If fertility declines in a herd, a farmer investigates immediately: Is there a mineral deficiency, toxin exposure, chronic stress, or poor nutrition? Something in the system is off.

When fertility declines across an entire culture, biologically and psychologically, we should be just as attentive.

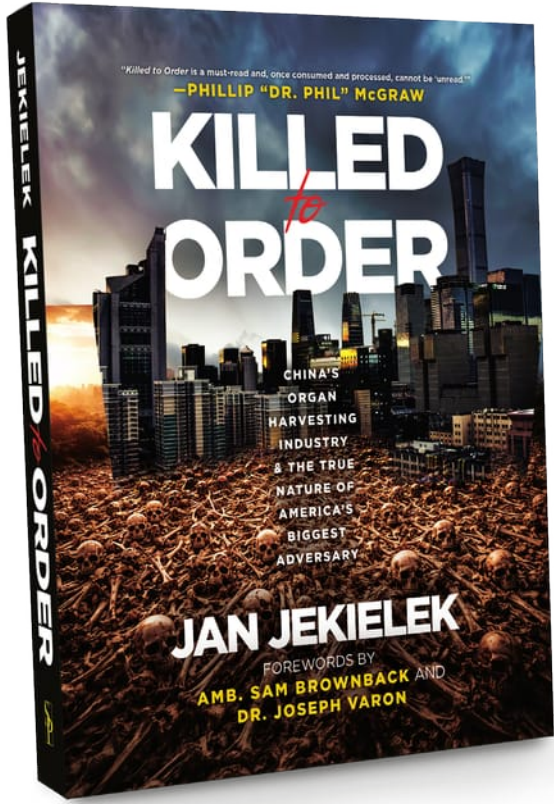
Are we disrupting our hormones? Yes. Are we economically straining young families? Often. But have we also absorbed a story about ourselves that makes continuation feel irresponsible?

Every one of us exists because thousands of people before us chose life. Through war, famine, uncertainty, and hardship, they believed in a future enough to create one. We are statistical miracles. Yet for the first time in many modern societies, a growing number of people are saying that the line stops with me.

In nature, reproduction slows only when survival is threatened. In humans, it can also slow when hope is.

When reproduction falters, it is a warning. We would be wise to listen.

Mollie Engelhart, regenerative farmer and rancher at Sovereignty Ranch, is committed to food sovereignty, soil regeneration, and educating on homesteading and self-sufficiency. She is the author of “Debunked by Nature.”



THE UNSPEAKABLE SECRET TO CHINA’S “SUCCESS”



Jan Jekielek
Author

FORCED ORGAN HARVESTING—an atrocity the Chinese regime can no longer deny. In this powerful investigation, Epoch Times senior editor Jan Jekielek uncovers decades of evidence exposing state-sanctioned organ harvesting

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California’s Self-Inflicted Gas Crisis, and Why You Pay so Much at the Pump

By Mike Fredenburg



If you have visited the gas pump and been watching the news, you know California is in the middle of an energy crisis. This crisis didn’t happen overnight—it’s the direct result of decades of environmental regulations that have strangled domestic oil production and refining. Since the 1980s, the state has lost more than 30 refineries, with recent closures reducing operable facilities from 40 in 1982 to just six or seven left operating by mid-February 2026.

Refining capacity has plummeted to about 1.3 million barrels per day today from 2.5 million barrels per day in 1982—a drop of 48 percent. During this same period, oil pumped from California wells dropped to a little more than 300,000 from more than 1 million barrels per day, a 70 percent decrease. However, during this same period, California’s population went to about 40 million from about 24 million, a 62.7 percent increase.

This means that on a per-capita basis, California refinery capacity decreased by 68 percent, and its oil well production decreased by about 80 percent. This leaves California capable of processing approximately 1 million to 1.3 million barrels per day total versus a daily need of about 1.6 million barrels of oil per day. Gasoline production has fallen by 6.2 million to 9.3 million gallons per day, leading to chronic shortages, price increases that have seen prices of \$1 to \$2 above the national average, and warnings that prices could climb to \$8 per gallon and higher.

The huge premium Californians pay for a gallon of gasoline can be attributed to three things. The first is a general hostility to the oil and gas industry, as embodied in unreasonable and unscientific environmental standards, that created an environment that has caused all but a



▲ A man pumps gas in Mill Valley, Calif., on Aug. 28, 2025.

few very hardy oil and gas companies to flee the state.

To compensate for the loss of domestic production, California not only buys crude oil from other countries but is now paying other countries to produce its special California-only gas and diesel formulation. And these countries largely depend on energy from coal-fired power plants to provide the power to produce the gas for California.

Speaking of the California Air Resources Board (CARB) mandate, it turns out that the special California-only gas that is supposed to lower pollution also reduces the miles per gallon of vehicles by 1 percent to 3 percent. This means drivers burn 1 percent to 3 percent more gasoline to go the same distance, adding more than 268 million more gallons required and more than 2 million more tons of CO2 to the atmosphere every year. Over the same period (1980 to 2025), Dallas, despite experiencing much faster popula-

tion and vehicle growth, matched Los Angeles’s decline in nitrogen oxide and aromatic pollution, about 75 percent, without having to resort to using a “boutique” CARB gas formulation.

California’s CARB mandate forces drivers onto a “fuel island,” cut off from the nation’s competitive supply. By prioritizing a “special” boutique blend over the already stringent and cheaper Federal Tier 3 standards, California has abandoned the volume efficiencies of a national market, leaving its drivers to pay a massive premium for a fuel that actually offers less energy per gallon and actually puts more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

Finally, California’s gasoline taxes and fees are the highest in the country, totaling roughly \$1.27 per gallon on average versus 40 cents to 50 cents per gallon on average in the other 49 states. A breakdown of California’s main gas taxes and fees (as of 2026):

- State excise tax—61.2 cents per gallon (July 2025 to June 2026 rate, second-highest in the country behind Illinois at 66.4 cents)
- Cap-and-trade program costs—23 cents in 2024 (Cap-and-Trade varies by year. Only California and Washington levy participate in Cap and Taxes on their residents)
- State and local sales taxes—population-weighted average of 41 cents per gallon (applied to the full retail price, including excise, using average gas price and the Tax Foundation average state and local sales tax of 8.99 percent)

In comparison, the national average state excise tax is about 33.5 cents per gallon, and total state-level taxes and fees across the United States typically range from 40 cents to 50 cents per gallon when including similar fees and sales taxes. The bottom line is this: Californians pay 77 cents to 87 cents more per gallon in state taxes and fees than the average U.S. resident, largely because of the high excise rate, cap-and-trade pass-throughs, and additional environmental fees. This contributes significantly to California’s pump prices being consistently \$1.00 to \$1.67 higher than the national average.

While the above analysis has primarily focused on normal gasoline, all the base reasons apply to diesel costs and availability as well.

All of this adds up to California creating extraordinarily high gas prices while also causing a fragile gas and energy infrastructure teetering on collapse.

Mike Fredenburg writes on military technology and defense matters with an emphasis on defense reform. He holds a bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering and master’s degree in production operations management.

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“Every morning, I look forward to reading The Epoch Times.

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What Kind of Ghost Will You Become?

By Jeff Minick



Look at any old person—and some young ones as well. Squint with your imagination beyond the flesh, and what you see is a mansion haunted by ghosts, some of them twisted and ugly spirits, others who are beautiful and good. These are the dead who live on in that man, and perhaps in his children and grandchildren.

All of us who are alive contain these apparitions. Some we experience as vividly as our face in this morning’s mirror, others much more dimly, remembering a glance, a word, a snatch of laughter. Some gladden our hearts, others bring tears of grief at their absence long after they have gone to the grave, and still others make us proud that we had the privilege of calling them friend.

Then there are those specters whose words and actions cut us as if they’d just sharpened those knives that very day rather than 50 years ago. Their jibes and insults, deliberately or carelessly delivered, remain embedded, arrows in the flesh; their betrayals rankle long after the consequences are inconsequential.

Naturally, we who are old usually accommodate the largest number of these guests without bodies. From septuagenarians—I am one of these—and up, the simple mathematics of a long life add more and more deceased souls to the time-spun tally. Grandparents, parents, wives, husbands, friends, teachers, and mentors march together, memorialized not so much by a stone and a grass-covered plot of earth as by memory and affection.

These shades haunt not only our own lives, but those closest to us as well, particularly our offspring. In the faces of several of my grandchildren, for instance, is the face of my wife, their never-to-be-known grandmother, dead now these 22 years, who shows herself as well in their kindness and love, and that of their parents, who were her children and mine.

In a novel to be released in late April, “Elegy in Blue,” which I’ve had the great privilege to read, Mark Helprin’s 82-year-



▲ Performers playing the Ghost of Christmas Past and Ebenezer Scrooge in a rehearsal of “A Christmas Carol” in Sheffield, England, on Nov. 6, 2024.

old unnamed protagonist and narrator describes his own ghosts throughout the book, paying in particular achingly beautiful tributes to his deceased wife, Clare.

Here, this same narrator points out another attribute of these spirits who frequent our lives. “My allegiance is to ghosts,” he declares. This allegiance is another phenomenon built from the passage of time, this loyalty and love for the dead. As the advancing years add to the ranks of the deceased, we who are old see them in our mind’s eye, and we listen and converse with them just as we do with those around us.

Which brings us all to a question: What kind of ghost will we be? Will those who live on after we have breathed our last honor our memories, tell others our stories, look past the grave for inspiration on their own journey through life?

Some future ghosts have already attained that winner’s platform in the minds and souls of others—men and women and children already certain to be remembered for their virtue, their charity, their winsome ways. They are the good and the beautiful who still live and breathe, and they will be

rightly remembered with love.

For those of us burdened with more dubious reputations, and worse, for those who are certain they will be cursed rather than blessed by memory, we must realize it’s never too late to change our ways and our thinking, and make amends.

Consider old Ebenezer Scrooge in “A Christmas Carol,” the bullying miser who in a single night of visitations from three Christmas spirits and from his own ghosts was utterly transformed: “He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world.”

Think of Chuck Colson, President Richard Nixon’s hatchet man, who experienced a conversion before serving seven months in prison and who emerged as a man on fire whose work brought hope to thousands of other prisoners and their families.

Think of George Wallace, forgotten by most Americans today, who, while campaigning in 1972 as a Democratic presidential nominee, was shot and paralyzed from the waist down. He, too, experienced a conversion, repudiated

his racism, apologized in person to numerous black leaders he’d offended, and in 1982 won 90 percent of the black vote to once again become governor of Alabama.

Whatever your status in life right now, renowned or unknown, rich or poor, whoever you are, and like it or not, as long as you breathe, you are creating the ghost you will someday become, the spirit lingering in the minds and hearts of others long after you’ve gone to your rest.

So choose wisely your ways and words. Love and inspire others today, and you may be doing the same a century from now. Your name may be long forgotten by then, but the piece of you that lives on in others will be both blessed and a blessing.

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminars of homeschooling students in Asheville, N.C. He is the author of two novels, “Amanda Bell” and “Dust on Their Wings,” and two works of nonfiction, “Learning as I Go” and “Movies Make the Man.” Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va.

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Proximity as Poison: What the Latest Epstein Files Reveal About Elite Insulation

By Tamuz Itai



When the Department of Justice released what it describes as the final tranche of Jeffrey Epstein documents under the Epstein Files Transparency Act on Jan. 30—nearly 3.5 million pages in total—the legal narrative barely shifted. No major new indictments emerged. What did change was the social story.

The files resurfaced a world most people never glimpse: the tightly knit network at the apex of politics, finance, royalty, academia, and celebrity. Not court rulings or smoking guns—just proximity. Names appearing together, contacts logged, and shared rooms and flights. The reaction was visceral, not only in the United States but also across the Atlantic.

In Britain, for example, the resurfaced ties—particularly those involving Peter Mandelson and his documented connections to Epstein—triggered a fresh crisis in Labor circles. Newspapers questioned vetting processes, Cabinet ministers distanced themselves from once-routine appointments, and internal revolts bubbled up. Leaders were compelled to explain not crimes but continued associations. The Telegraph captured the mood: a government under pressure as public trust collided with elite social networks, igniting open revolt within the ruling party.

Suddenly, the public could see how small the world of power truly is—how frequently the same names recur, how interconnected elite circles remain, and how rapidly proximity turns into political poison when trust fractures.

Most names that have surfaced in public discussion have not faced charges. Appearance is not guilt. Association is not conviction. But public reaction rarely follows courtroom logic. It functions like a stress test: A photograph, a social tie, and a vetting decision all become a referendum on judgment.

The core question is deceptively simple: How does someone like Epstein embed so deeply in elite networks without setting off alarms? That question extends beyond a single scandal, as history suggests it is far from new.

Most imagine elite corruption as a conspiracy. Reality is usually more banal, and perhaps more dangerous. Elite society operates like a social ecosystem. Invitations, patronage, conferences, foundations, advisory boards, private dinners—these are the mechanisms. Presence becomes currency, access becomes reputation, and reputation becomes power. You don't have to like everyone in the circle. You just have to circulate. Naturally, one in such circles will have multiple photos of oneself smiling with others at various public and private events. This does not imply guilt.

This circulation creates a paradox: The trust, familiarity, and repeated contact that make elite networks actually function also insulate them. People assume those around them have already been vetted. Reputation turns self-reinforcing. Raising doubt becomes socially expensive—no one wants to be the alarm-raiser in a room of powerful friends, because the cost is enormous.

Blind spots form through comfort. A well-connected figure becomes a bridge; bridges are rarely questioned because questioning them threatens everyone who crosses. The system protects the bridge until it collapses—only then does everyone wonder how it had stood for so long.

The Mechanism of Rot

Elite decay begins with a story that elites, and those who aspire to be, tell themselves. Every stable ruling class develops a mental division: those inside the circle and everyone else. Not codified, not announced, but visible in behavior. The circle becomes the reference point for reality. Problems are discussed, and risks are assessed within them. Moral obligations shrink to their perimeter, and suffering outside becomes abstract.

This is not modern. It is one of history's most consistent red flags for a society.

In late Rome, aristocratic families governed provinces through tax systems they no longer experienced personally; senators debated fiscal policy while infrastructure decayed. The empire



▲ Redacted documents from the Epstein Library files released by the Justice Department, in Washington on Feb. 18, 2026.

Elite society operates like a social ecosystem. The trust, familiarity, and repeated contact that make elite networks actually function also insulate them.

Once a ruling class sees itself as separate, accountability becomes optional.

weakened not because elites were cartoon villains, but because they ceased to feel the consequences of their decisions. Extraction continued while reciprocity faded.

In Bourbon France, Versailles became a detached social universe. Nobility vied for proximity to the king while grain shortages ravaged regions. Bread riots were disturbances at the edge of their world, not systemic warnings. The apocryphal “let them eat cake” endures because it captures a deeper psychological truth: Elites no longer grasped the conditions of those they ruled.

Pre-1917 Russia had an aristocracy that was culturally European, French-speaking, and socially insulated—living in salons while industrial misery worsened in cities they rarely entered. The collapse shocked them not because the signs were absent, but because they belonged to a different world.

Late Qing China revolved around court rituals and factional maneuvering as foreign pressure and domestic unrest mounted. Corruption was often institutional self-preservation—protecting networks rather than reforming systems. The state hollowed from within.

Entitlement Drift

Entitlement drift compounds this. Elites rarely wake up as villains. They wake up believing they are necessary: Politicians carry national responsibility, scientists advance humanity, and artists sustain culture. These beliefs are often true. Danger arrives when importance quietly becomes exception—“my rewards should be exceptional,” “normal limits don't fully apply.”

The shift is rarely conscious. It is slow rationalization—flattery from patrons, access from networks, luxuries reframed as deserved correction. Red flags blur. Boundaries soften. Environments that would alarm outsiders feel normal to insiders, convinced they belong.

Corruption is not always financial. Sometimes it is moral. It rarely announces itself while occurring. Elites wake inside a comforting, lethal narrative: the system is stable, the circle competent, disturbances external. Once a ruling class sees itself as separate, accountability becomes optional. Reputation inside the circle trumps legitimacy outside. The moral map shrinks. Corruption begins looking like normal administration.

The Pressure Cooker

When ruling classes drift too far, resentment accumulates. Institutions absorb strain for a time. Then, suddenly, they don't.

The French Revolution's timing matters more than its slogans. Reform was possible for decades before 1789—fiscal restructuring, concessions, and tax modernization were discussed but stalled by elite reluctance to surrender privilege. When change arrived, it was vengeance, not reform. Maximilien Robespierre's relentless guillotine was pressure converted into machinery.

Russia's 1917 arc mirrored it: visible unrest, proposed reforms delayed or diluted. Collapse produced not a liberal adjustment but a killing machine. Millions died because incremental change

was postponed until radical rupture seemed the only credible path.

In both cases, later generations asked: Could this have been avoided? Not by erasing elites, but by taking earlier responsibility, exercising restraint, and ensuring accountability. When reform arrives early, societies bend. When late, they break. Delayed correction produces extremity, not balance. It consumes systems indiscriminately. Ordinary people—not just architects of decay—stand in the blast radius.

Yet history also records near-misses. Nineteenth-century Britain faced industrial unrest, poverty, and exclusion that could have sparked a French-style rupture. Gradual, contested reforms—expanded representation, labor improvements—renegotiated the social contract and averted collapse. Post-1945 Western Europe, reeling from two near-suicidal wars, built systems and checks not from charity but as what they perceived to be self-preservation.

Modern elite insulation looks different—no Versailles pomp, but institutional drift. COVID-19-pandemic-era policy shifts created perceptions of moving goalposts and dismissed dissent. Globalization delivered top-tier wealth while hollowing out industrial communities—experienced as abandonment.

Conclusion

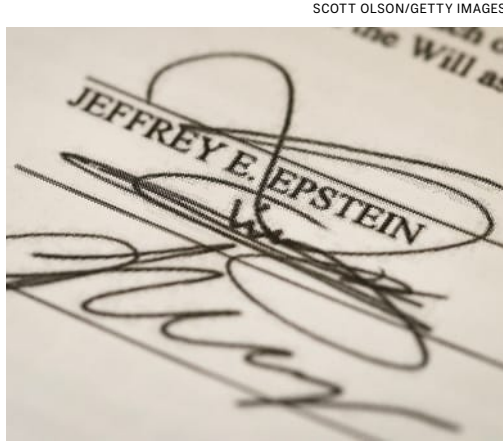
When citizens conclude that elites profit while others absorb risk, reciprocity frays. The social contract does not self-repair.

Elites are inevitable, and perhaps desirable, in civilizations. The question is whether they remember their function. Power without obligation corrodes legitimacy; power with obligation sustains it. Accountability requires confronting wrongdoing—without cycles of revenge. Without accountability, trust dies. Without forgiveness (or at least restraint), politics becomes permanent civil war.

History's warning is brutal, and its instruction simple: When elites remain grounded, correction is peaceful. When they detach, correction may become violent. The choice appears in small decisions—transparency, restraint, humility, responsibility. Those decisions can determine whether societies bend or break.

The Epstein files are a mirror. They force every era's unavoidable question: Will those closest to power treat proximity as privilege—or as duty?

Tamuz Itai is a journalist and columnist who lives in Tel Aviv, Israel.



▲ Jeffrey Epstein's signature on a will, part of the Epstein files released by the Department of Justice in Chicago on Feb. 13, 2026.

SPECIAL SERIES: HOW THE SPECTER OF COMMUNISM IS RULING OUR WORLD

Sabotaging Education

The Epoch Times here serializes an adaptation from the Chinese of “How the Specter of Communism Is Ruling Our World,” by the editorial team of the “Nine Commentaries on the Communist Party.”

CHAPTER
12

3. How Communism Destroyed Education in China

In 1958, the CCP started its education revolution, which had the following notable features:

Firstly, education was emphasized as a tool that should be used in service of the proletariat. Students, under the leadership of the Party Committee, were organized to prepare the curricula and teaching materials. At Peking University, 60 students in the Chinese language department wrote a 700,000-character treatise called the “History of Chinese Literature” in only 30 days. [108] This incident fully exemplified the core belief of progressive education that teaching methods should be “student-centric” and focused on “exploratory learning” and “cooperative learning”—that is, what to learn and how to learn it were to be discussed and decided by the students themselves. The objective was clear: eliminate “superstitious beliefs” in authority figures (which was meant to instill an attitude opposed to tradition), magnify students’ self-centeredness, and lay the foundation for rebellion during the Cultural Revolution to come.

Secondly, education and productive labor were to be joined together. Every school had its own factory, and during the height of the Great Leap Forward, teachers and students smelted steel and tilled the land. Even Renmin University of China, which had previously focused on social disciplines, operated 108 factories. Supposedly, this was to have students “learn by doing.”

In the subsequent Cultural Revolution, students were mobilized to destroy all forms of cultural heritage associated with traditional culture, including tangible artifacts and religious beliefs (see Chapter Six). This again echoes the counterculture movement that took place in the West.

After the Cultural Revolution began, Mao felt that “bourgeois intellectuals” should not run the schools. On June 13, 1966, the CCP issued a notice to reform university admissions and started the “corrective action campaign.” University entrance exams were abolished and large numbers of “worker-peasant-soldier” students were enrolled.

The 1975 film “Breaking With Old Ideas,” produced during the Cultural Revolution, reflected the ideological spirit of this campaign: “A youth who grew up on a poor farm is not sufficiently literate, but the calluses on his hands from hard farm work qualify him for enrollment.” A school principal said: “Can you blame us for their low level of literacy? No! This debt should be settled with the Nationalists, the landowners, and the capitalist class [the oppressors]!”

In the West, a professor published a paper claiming that standards in mathematics led to racial discrimination (because students of certain ethnic minority groups have lower math scores compared to white students). [109] Another professor published a paper that said math standards based on the higher scores achieved by male students led to gender discrimination against females when they were held to the same standard. [110] Qualifying students for university based on the calluses they have or attributing lower math scores to racial and gender discrimination are methods that communism uses to dumb down students and stunt their intellectual growth.

After the Cultural Revolution, China resumed its university entrance examinations. From then on, preparing for this exam was the ultimate objective of primary and high school education. Under this utilitarian education system, many students became like machines that learned only how to pass exams, without the ability to think independently or to distinguish right from wrong. At the same time, Marxist philosophy, politics, and economics have remained mandatory exam subjects.

In the minds of students who are cut off from tradition, the standards of right and wrong, and good and evil, are



JEAN VINCENT/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

▲ Young Red Guards wave copies of Mao Zedong’s “Little Red Book” as they parade through the streets of Beijing in June 1966.

all evaluated according to communist standards. Thus after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, many Chinese students cheered. Primary school students declare that they want to become corrupt officials when they grow up. University students prostitute themselves and become surrogate mothers for cash.

4. Returning to Traditional Education

The education system shoulders the future of a country, a nation, and human civilization itself. It is a long-term endeavor whose impact extends through centuries or even millennia.

Looking back at the past 100 years, the American education system has been all but broken by the infiltration and influence of communist ideology. Parents and teachers have had their hands tied and cannot easily give students a good education. Schools, which should have cultivated students’ talent, have instead indulged them and led them astray.

Much of society is deeply worried about students’ lack of morality, low skill level, fragile psyches, and bad habits, as well as the chaotic antitraditional and anti-social trends they’re caught up in.

Nine of the 45 goals of communism, listed in the 1958 classic “The Naked Communist,” relate to education, including “Get control of the schools. Use them as transmission belts for socialism and current Communist propaganda. Soften the curriculum. Get control of teachers’ associations. Put the party line in textbooks.” [111]

This has not only been achieved, but the situation has become worse. Due to the political and economic strength of the United States, American culture is the object of admiration and emulation by countries around the world. Many countries use the United States as a model for education reform and are influenced by American teaching concepts, teaching materials, teaching methods, and school-management practices. So, to a certain extent, changing American education is tantamount to changing education around the world.

Enlightened sages or saints appear both at the creation of human culture and in

times when civilization has fallen into moral corruption. These sages and saints take the role of “teacher.” For example, Socrates, the founder of the ancient Greek civilization, was an educator. In the Gospels, Jesus also called himself a teacher. Sakyamuni Buddha has 10 names, one of which is “the teacher of heaven and man.” Confucius was an educator, and Lao Tzu was his teacher. They taught people how to be human, how to respect the divine, how to get along with others, and how to improve morality.

These enlightened beings and saints are the greatest educators of mankind. Their words have shaped major civilizations and become fundamental classics. The values they teach, and the ways they go about improving morality, allow each individual to achieve spiritual transcendence and health. Individuals with healthy minds are essential to social health. It is no wonder that these greatest educators have come to a similar conclusion: The purpose of education is the cultivation of good character.

Eastern and Western classical education, which have been practiced for thousands of years, have inherited the culture that the divine has given to people and retain precious experiences and resources. According to the spirit of classical education, both talent and integrity are important criteria for judging the success of education. In the process of reviving the tradition of human education, the treasure that is classical education is worthy of preservation, exploration, and learning.

People with high moral values are capable of self-governing. This is the social norm that the American Founding Fathers hoped for. Those who are morally noble will receive divine blessings and, through diligence and wisdom, can obtain material abundance and spiritual satisfaction. More importantly, people with high moral standards allow society to flourish and last for generations. These are the teachings of enlightened beings and saints, the greatest educators of humankind.

Notes

108. Luo Pinghan 罗平汉, “1958 nian de jiaoyu geming” 1958年的教育革命 [“The Educational Revolution of 1958”], in Dangshi xijie 党史细节 [Details in the History of the Communist Party], vol. 34. [In Chinese]

109. Robert Gearty, “White Privilege Bolstered by Teaching Math, University Professor Says,” Fox News, Oct. 24, 2017.

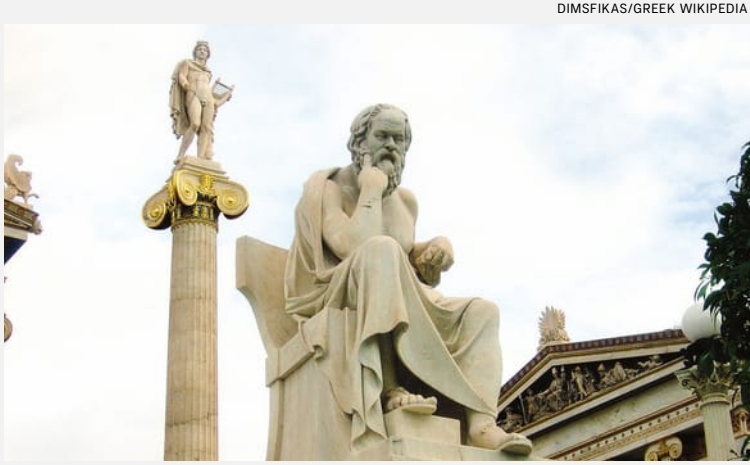
110. Toni Airaksinen, “Prof Complains About ‘Masculinization of Mathematics,’” Campus Reform, Aug. 24, 2017.

111. W. Cleon Skousen, “The Naked Communist” (Salt Lake City: The Ensign Publishing Co., 1962), chap. 12.

This concludes Chapter 12

See next edition for the next installment.

During the Cultural Revolution, students were mobilized to destroy all forms of cultural heritage associated with traditional culture.



DIMSFIKAS/GREEK WIKIPEDIA

▲ A statue of ancient Greek philosopher Socrates in front of the Academy of Athens in Greece, in this file photo.



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THE EPOCH TIMES

US Mortgage Rates Fall to 41-Month Low

By Naveen Athrappully

The weekly average mortgage rate on a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage has dropped to its lowest level in 41 months, easing affordability concerns among prospective homebuyers, according to Feb. 19 data from Freddie Mac.

For the week ending on Feb. 19, the 30-year weekly rate was 6.01 percent.

“Mortgage rates dropped again this week, now down to their lowest level since September of 2022,” Sam Khater, Freddie Mac’s chief economist, said in a statement. Rates were at 6.02 percent on Sept. 14, 2022.

“This lower rate environment is not only improving affordability for prospective homebuyers, it’s also strengthening the financial position of homeowners,” Khater said. “Over the past year, refinance application activity has more than doubled, enabling many recent buyers to reduce their annual mortgage payments by thousands of dollars.”

The current 6.01 percent mortgage rate is almost 1 percentage point lower than the 6.96 percent rate when the Trump administration took office on Jan. 20, 2025.

According to the National Association of Realtors, the median sales price of an existing home in January 2026 was \$396,800. The rate dip during the Trump administration lowers the monthly mortgage payment for such a home with a 20 percent down payment to \$2,284 from \$2,482, a savings of nearly \$200 per month for a homeowner, according to a Zillow home loan calculator.

In a Feb. 19 statement, the White House said President Donald Trump was “delivering real progress in making homeownership and housing more affordable” for Americans.

“These encouraging developments are part of a broader wave of positive momentum in the housing market under President Trump’s leadership,” the White House said.

The Trump administration has taken several actions to boost home affordability. In January 2026, Trump signed an executive order restricting Wall Street companies from buying single-family homes nationwide.

“Hard-working young families cannot effectively compete for starter homes with Wall Street firms and their vast resources,” Trump wrote in the order.

“Neighborhoods and communities once controlled by middle-class American families are now run by faraway corporate interests.”

This lower rate environment is not only improving affordability for prospective homebuyers, it’s also strengthening the financial position of homeowners.”

Sam Khater, chief economist, Freddie Mac

Last month, Trump announced on Truth Social that he had ordered the purchase of \$200 billion in mortgage bonds, which is expected to lower mortgage rates and reduce monthly payments.

The federal government is also looking to introduce 50-year mortgage terms to lower monthly payments, open federal lands for construction, and issue a national housing emergency declaration to speed up development.

“The Trump Administration remains fully committed to building a strong, accessible housing market that works for every American family,” the White House said.

“This includes continued efforts to combat inflation, support job creation, increase housing supply, and promote long-term prosperity—so that all Americans can thrive and own their piece of the American Dream.”

Amid declining mortgage rates, mortgage applications to buy new homes increased on a monthly and annual basis in January 2026, the Mortgage Bankers Association said in a Feb. 19 statement.

Applications grew by 19 percent in January 2026 from December 2025, and by 2 percent from a year ago.

According to a Feb. 18 statement from

the Census Bureau, both building permit authorizations and housing starts registered monthly gains in December 2025.

Permit authorizations rose by 4.3 percent from November 2025, while housing starts jumped by 6.2 percent, suggesting that momentum is picking up among these metrics.

In a Feb. 17 statement, the National Association of Home Builders said that although the housing sector faces challenges in 2026, the association still has “cautious optimism” about the market.

“The housing market will continue to face several headwinds in 2026, including economic policy uncertainty as well as a softening labor market and ongoing affordability problems,” the statement reads.

“But easing financial conditions led by an anticipated modest reduction in mortgage rates should help to somewhat offset these market challenges and support production and sales.”

The National Association of Home Builders expects mortgage rates to remain slightly higher than 6 percent in 2026, gradually declining as the Federal Reserve cuts its benchmark interest rate.



▲ Prospective homebuyers leave a property for sale in Clarksburg, Md., on Sept. 3, 2023.

Renters Could See More Price Breaks as Apartment Vacancy Rates Hit Multi-Year High

By Mary Prenon

Potential renters on the sidelines waiting for rents to go down may be in luck, as the average vacancy rates have reached a multi-year high in 44 of the 50 largest metros in the United States.

In its January 2026 rental report, released on Feb. 17, Realtor.com said that the average vacancy rate for apartments reached 7.6 percent in 2025—jumping from 7.2 percent in 2024. It also noted that January marked the 29th consecutive month of year-over-year rent declines, with the national median rent dropping by 1.5 percent to \$1,672 for all apartment sizes.

“After years of being squeezed by limited inventory, renters are finally seeing the supply wave work in their favor,” Realtor.com chief economist Danielle Hale said in the report.

“This shift doesn’t just mean lower prices; it means that renters today have more options and more bargaining power.”

According to the report, Milwaukee saw the country’s most dramatic shift in vacancy rates, with the average rate increasing to 10.8 percent in 2025 from 4.9 percent in 2024.

Renters may also have the upper hand

in 22 other metros where vacancy rates have jumped by more than 7 percent, with Birmingham, Alabama, topping those rates at 14.3 percent.

Additional renter-friendly metros include Austin, Texas, with a vacancy rate of 13.8 percent; Buffalo, New York, at 12.5 percent; Dallas–Fort Worth at 10.5 percent; Orlando at 9 percent; and Phoenix at 8.4 percent.

After years of being squeezed by limited inventory, renters are finally seeing the supply wave work in their favor.

Danielle Hale, chief economist, Realtor.com

The report also identified 22 balanced markets with vacancy rates between 5 percent and 7 percent. Only six markets—Boston; New York City; Los Angeles; Providence, Rhode Island; and California’s Riverside and San Jose—were deemed “landlord-friendly” with rates lower than 5 percent. Boston recorded

the lowest vacancy rate of all 50 metros at just 3.2 percent.

Nationally, the report found that studio apartments were leasing for an average of \$1,393, one-bedrooms for \$1,552, and two-bedrooms for \$1,847.

Some markets that had been traditionally favorable to renters such as Richmond, Virginia, and Pittsburgh have become more competitive, reflecting a large influx of new renters driven by local job growth and migration from more expensive metros.

“We are seeing a fascinating tug-of-war,” Realtor.com economist Jiayi Xu said in the report.

“In the Sun Belt and parts of the Midwest, new construction is helping to create negotiating room for renters. But in traditionally more affordable areas like Richmond and Pittsburgh, the secret is out.”

Meanwhile, a same-day report from RentCafe states its top trending cities for 2026, with Cincinnati topping the list. Other desirable locations forecast for this year include Atlanta, Minneapolis, Washington, and Baltimore.

Renters searched and saved apartment listings in Cincinnati more than in any other area, boosting the city 10 positions higher than last year. RentCafe

put the average rent of a studio apartment there at \$1,098 per month and a one-bedroom apartment there at \$1,267.

The report notes that much of the demand is from renters relocating to Cincinnati from high-cost coastal metros in search of a location with a growing job market, particularly in the health care, manufacturing, and finance industries. Most of the interest in the city came from Columbus, Ohio, with additional inquiries from Chicago and New York City.

Atlanta’s booming job market in technology and film is attracting renters from New York City and other Georgia locations, such as Marietta and Sandy Springs. Renters typically pay \$1,471 per month for a studio and \$1,594 for a one-bedroom.

Although Washington slid three spots from last year’s ranking, the metro is still considered a hot spot for renters associated with federal agencies, contractors, and embassies. The average rent in the nation’s capital remains higher than that of many other metros, at \$1,862 for a studio and \$2,331 for a one-bedroom.

Completing the top 10 list for 2026 trending cities are Cleveland; San Jose, California; Philadelphia; Birmingham, Alabama; and Kansas City, Missouri.

Regionally, the Midwest and South metros garnered the most attention, with 11 Midwest cities listed among the top 30 locations. Ten cities in the South were listed in the top 30, but only seven were located in the West and two in the Northeast.



Affordability Concerns Continue to Pressure Builder Sentiment, NAHB Says

Workers construct housing in Fontana, Calif., on Sept. 17, 2025.

By Rob Sabo

Housing affordability continues to pressure homebuyers and builders, with home-builder confidence dropping for the second consecutive month to open the new year.

Builder confidence for erecting new single-family stick-built homes dipped by one point to 36 in February, the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) and Wells Fargo said in their latest housing market index report released on Feb. 17.

The NAHB has conducted the survey for more than four decades as a gauge of present and future sales of single-family homes, as well as the prospective pool of buyers. Any number lower than 50 equals a weak outlook on current housing market conditions.

NAHB Chairman Buddy Hughes said builders lowered their expectations of future sales because of continued high housing costs that have priced many potential homebuyers out of the market.

"While the majority of builders continue to deploy buyer incentives, including price cuts, many prospective buyers remain on the sidelines," said Hughes, a third-generation homebuilder and owner of Hughes Design and Construction in Lexington, Kentucky.

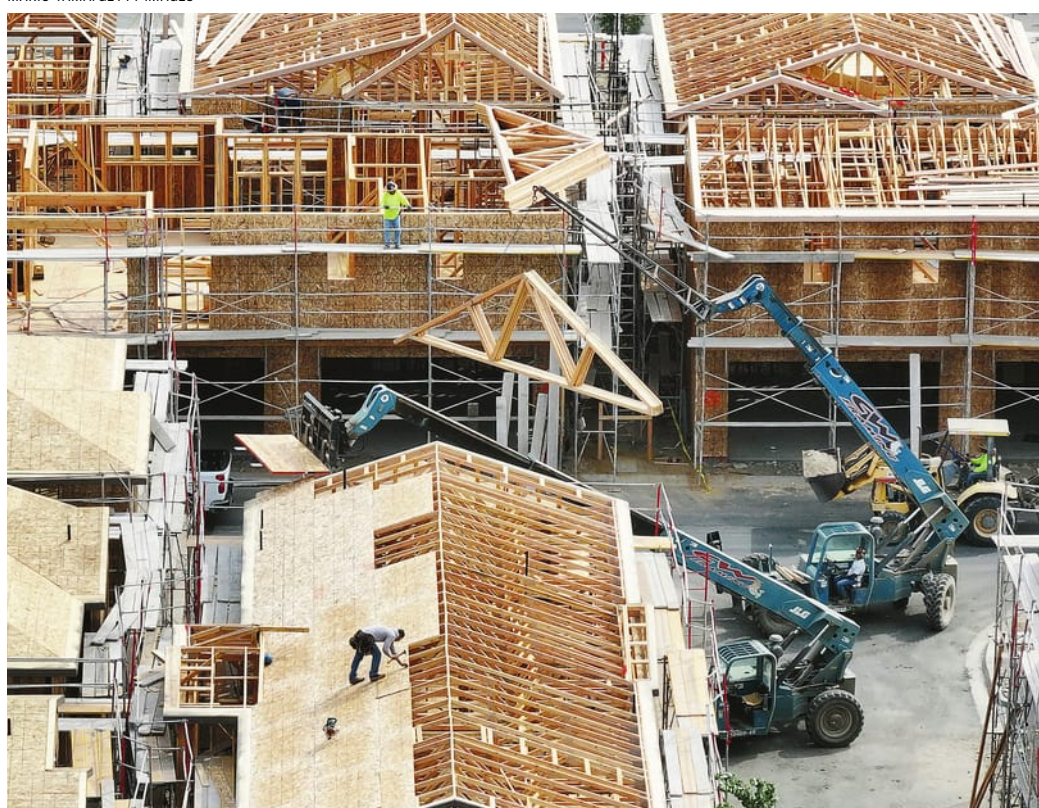
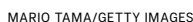
“Although demand for new construction has weakened, remodeling demand has remained solid given a lack of household mobility.”

According to a recent study by the NAHB, more than 88.2 million U.S. households are unable to afford a home at the national median cost of \$413,595 with a mortgage interest rate of 6 percent. A modest \$1,000 increase in cost would price out an additional 156,405 Americans from buying a home, according to the association.

The NAHB's most recent housing mar-

While the majority of builders continue to deploy buyer incentives, including price cuts, many prospective buyers remain on the sidelines.

Buddy Hughes,
chairman, NAHB



ket index study found that 36 percent of homebuilders slashed prices by 6 percent or more in February, down from 40 percent who did so a month earlier. Also, 65 percent of builders used sales incentives to draw in potential homebuyers, unchanged from January.

Robert Dietz, chief economist for the NAHB, said housing affordability is a primary challenge to overcome in 2026.

“The solution for the housing market is the enactment of policies that will bend the construction cost curve and enable additional supply of attainable housing,” Dietz said.

“On the positive side, easing inflation should continue to allow lower interest rates for mortgages and builder loans.”

Builder sentiment was softest in the West at an index rating of 33, followed by the South at 35. Builder sentiment was slightly better in the Northeast and Midwest at 43.

Builders said the biggest hurdles they face in 2026 include elevated interest rates (65 percent, down from 84 percent in 2025) and buyer sentiment that home prices will decline in the future if they hold off on making a purchase (74 percent).

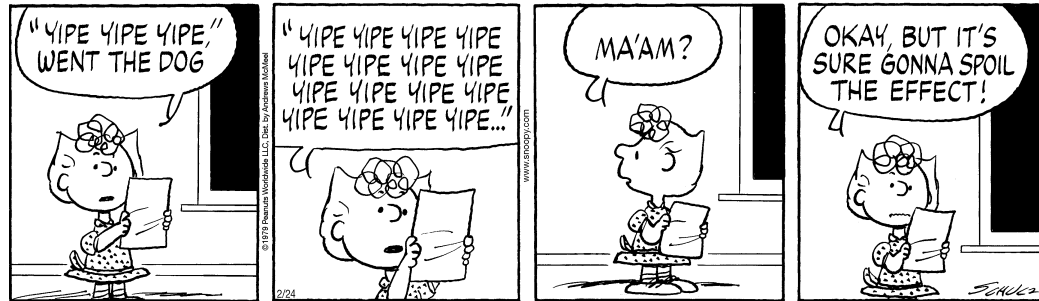
Looking back on the past year, builders said high costs for land and a lack of available lots, along with labor shortages and the high cost of builder materials, were the most significant challenges they faced in 2025. Those three issues continue to be the main challenges homebuilders face in 2026, the NAHB said.

Comics

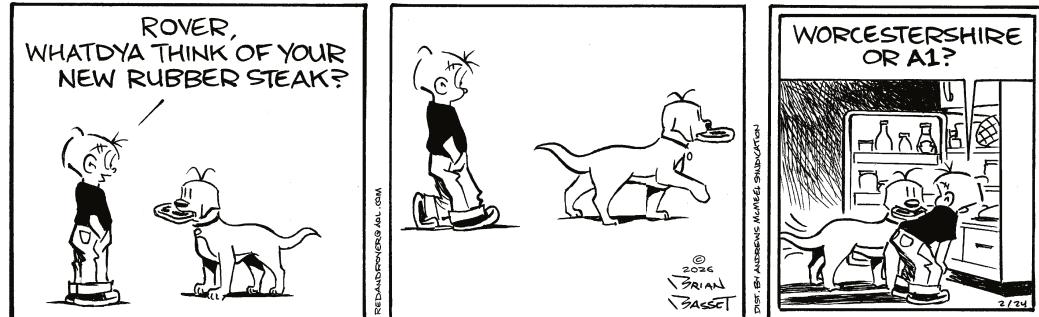
TANK MCNAMARA



PEANUTS



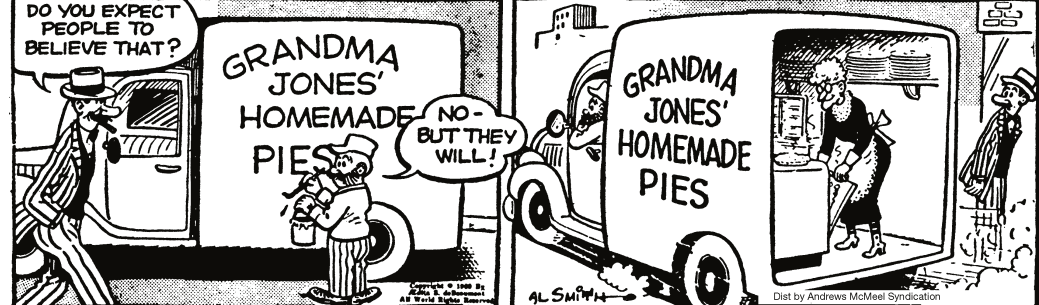
RED AND ROVER



GRAND AVENUE



MUTT & JEFF



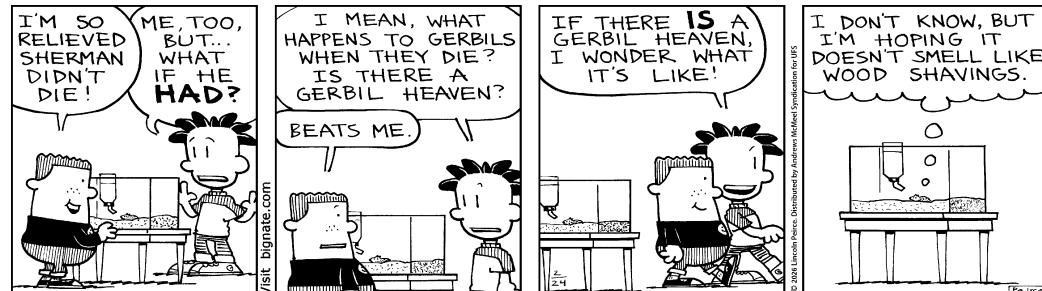
GARFIELD



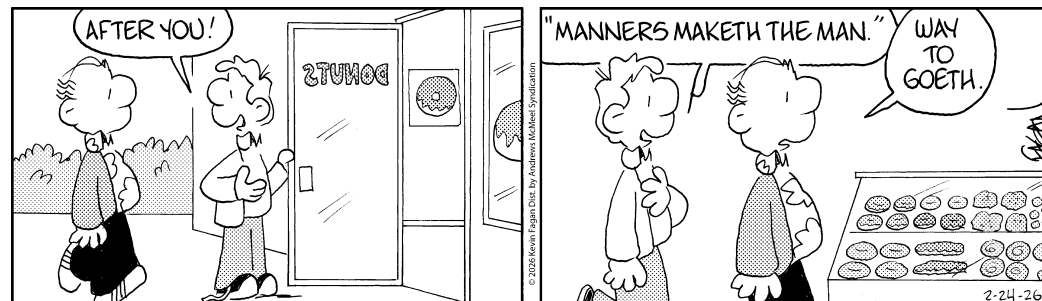
BABY BLUES



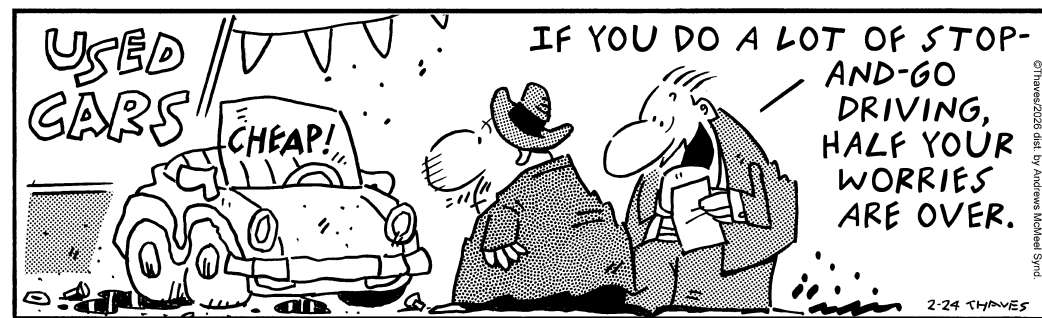
BIG NATE



DRABBLE

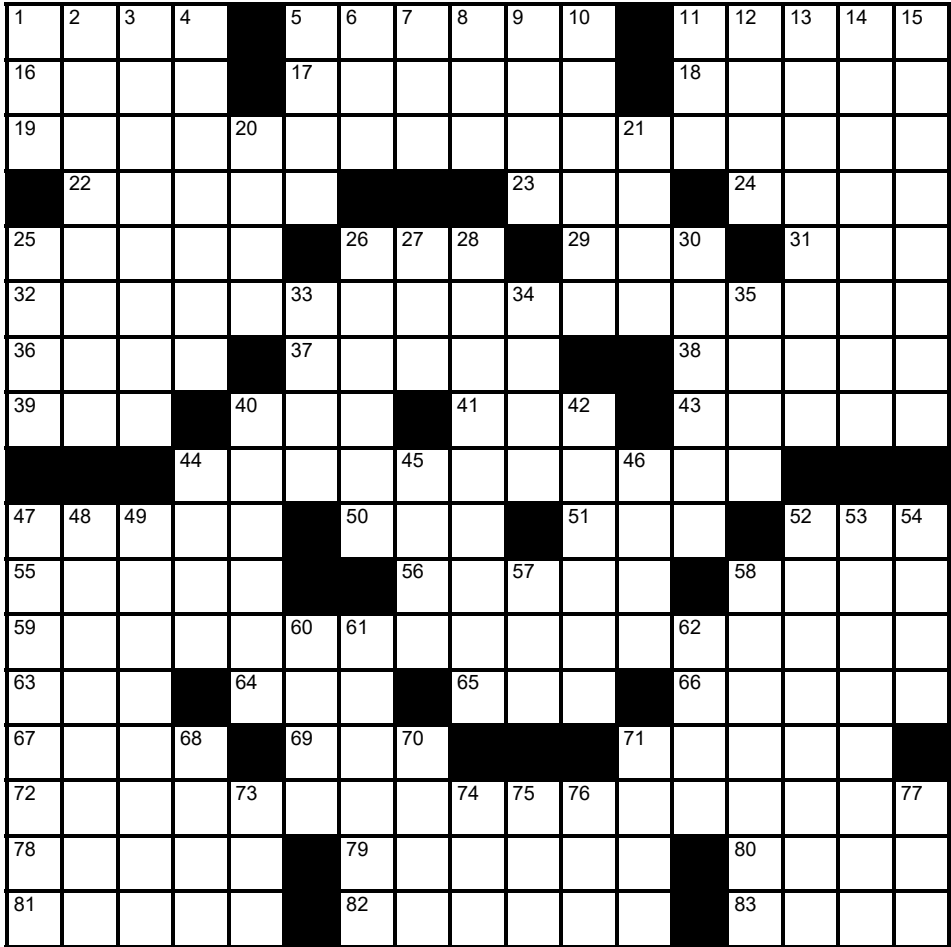


FRANK AND ERNEST



CROSSWORD

CONSTRUCTED BY TOM HOUSTON
EPOCH TIMES STAFF



Across

- 1. History Muse
- 5. Individual souls, in Hinduism
- 11. Saying
- 16. Doody
- 17. "I ___ Babe"
- 18. Mummy, in Paris
- 19. Description for Romeo and Juliet
- 22. Chinese statesman Zhou ___
- 23. Jack of "Barney Miller"
- 24. Opposite of ecto-
- 25. Join the cast of
- 26. Daft
- 29. Campground letters
- 31. Pa. neighbor
- 32. Beach activity
- 36. Sheltered, nautically
- 37. "___ B There" (James Ingram/Michael McDonald hit)

- 38. Guardian spirits
- 39. Airport NW of PIT
- 40. Mr., in India
- 41. "Friendly" starter
- 43. Like kelp
- 44. Buffet specialty
- 47. "Built to ___ lifetime"
- 50. "___ Can Cook": PBS show
- 51. Outfield surface
- 52. A.M.A. members
- 55. "Fuzzy Wuzzy was ___"
- 56. "Come & Get It" singer Selena
- 58. "Bugsy Malone" star Scott
- 59. Angering
- 63. Common pee-fix?
- 64. Balloon filler
- 65. Ave. crossers
- 66. '03 Mazda roadster
- 67. Cabinet dept.
- 69. File folder feature
- 71. \$500

- 72. Career-completion celebrations
- 78. Attempt another drive
- 79. What Gregor Mendel bred (Arch.)
- 80. Lizard fish
- 81. ___ Gay (W.W. II plane)
- 82. Advance
- 83. Bad guy

Down

- 1. IV units
- 2. Game-deciding judgment
- 3. "It's dark in here!"
- 4. Descriptor of a sea snake's tail
- 5. Culture starter
- 6. Also
- 7. Range units: Abbr.
- 8. Cries of regret
- 9. Some votes
- 10. Logic puzzle in the paper
- 11. Latin 101 verb

- 12. Jay's late-night rival
- 13. Improving
- 14. "Moonstruck" actor Vincent
- 15. Panama City Beach resort
- 20. "... pretty please?"
- 21. Crackpot
- 25. Calculating device: Var.
- 26. Andy Griffith's NC birthplace
- 27. "Oh, god, that feels good"
- 28. Bearings
- 30. Heavenly home of the Norse gods
- 33. "Eli's Coming" composer Laura
- 34. The SPCA et al.
- 35. Didn't break
- 40. One of Nina's companions
- 42. Haunt
- 44. "Now!"
- 45. Around the bend
- 46. Fall through the cracks?
- 47. "C'est ___"
- 48. North Sea oil port
- 49. Intend
- 52. Certain miner's source
- 53. Batons, shields, etc.
- 54. Crash site?
- 57. Cambridge univ.
- 58. Developed
- 60. "In the Still of the ___" (Boyz II Men hit)
- 61. "Lassie" character
- 62. Actor Sharif
- 68. French sky
- 70. ___ greens
- 71. Door securer
- 73. Stephen of "The Crying Game"
- 74. Scot's refusal
- 75. Recipe amt.
- 76. Little, in Lille
- 77. Equinox mo

4NUMBERS

CONSTRUCTED BY C. CHANG
AT 4NUMS.COM

Use the four numbers in the corners, and the operators (+, -, and x) to **build an equation** to get the solution in the middle. There may be more than one "unique" solution but, there may also be "equivalent" solutions. For example: 6 + (7 x 3) +1 = 28 and 1+ (7 x 3) + 6 = 28

1336

18

919

+ - × ÷

Hard 1 - 1 Solution

1329

83

1127

+ - × ÷

Hard 2 - 1 Solution

27

34

24

+ - × ÷

Easy 1 - 1 Solution

34

14

34

+ - × ÷

Easy 2 - 1 Solution

DAILY BRIDGE CLUB

CUT-RATE PLAY

BY FRANK STEWART, TRIBUNE CONTENT AGENCY
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Heard about the store manager who used a product-label gun to fight off an attempted robbery? The robber got away, but he has a price on his head.

Both the play and defense in today's deal were criminal. Against four hearts, West led the ace and a low diamond. East won with the jack and returned the eight. Declarer ruffed with the ace of trumps, and West threw a spade.

South next led a trump to dummy's nine and tried a club to his queen, but West produced the king and led a trump. Then South could ruff only one club in dummy and lost a second club. Down one.

CLUB RUFFS

I would label the play and defense as cut-rate. After ruffing the third diamond, South must lead the ace and a low club. He can win a trump return, ruff a club, come to his ace of spades and ruff his last club.

A trump opening lead would beat the contract. That lead wasn't obvious, but either West or East could have found a trump shift. Then when West gets in, he leads a second trump, and South fails.

DAILY QUESTION

You hold: ♠ K Q J 10 6 ♥ 4 ♦ K J 9 8 ♣ 10 4 2. Your partner deals and passes, and the next player passes. East in today's deal opened one spade with this hand. Do you agree with that call?

ANSWER: It is common to open light hands in third seat to direct a lead, but such openings should still deliver some defensive tricks. Many players would open two spades, weak, despite having only five spades. Partner is a passed hand, so no harm is likely.

West dealer
Neither side vulnerable

NORTH

♠ 9 5 4
♥ J 9 3
♦ Q 6 5 4 2
♣ 8 7

WEST

♠ 8 7 3 2
♥ 8 7 5
♦ A 3
♣ K J 9 6

EAST

♠ K Q J 10 6
♥ 4
♦ K J 9 8
♣ 10 4 2

SOUTH

♠ A
♥ A K Q 10 6 2
♦ 10 7
♣ A Q 5 3

West Pass
Pass 2 ♠
All Pass

North Pass
Pass

East 1 ♠
Pass

South Dbl
4 ♥

Opening lead – ♦ A

WORDSEARCH

CONSTRUCTED BY TOM HOUSTON
EPOCH TIMES STAFF

HELP WITH TODAY'S CROSSWORD PUZZLE?

A L G A L H A A R B S G R A M P S
M Z E R C S M C S A T O E A I L M
T S T E P U T M S A T T F A A O
S G T T D D P I A K R Y I H T T R
E O I E E O E N R I C O R A A E G
I M N E M K A E I N R U E L D C A
C E G H E U S N A T O Y M F A A S
A Z A D A G E L A H S B E G T L B
N Y R G N G S A B E S U N L A L O
T E I A O A A I E S E I T A F S R
S N S R R S E H R U D L P G I E D
E S E D S G N M D N L T A U L T O
E O O E L A O A E S O U R E E O B
G L U N A R L M E H V P T R R U S
S E T I S D A A N I E Y I R S T E
Q I O A T M A N S N R R E E L T S
G L F O A R L I K E S K S Y R O S

ABERDEEN	DEMEANORS	HALF G	RETEE
ACTIN	EN SOLEIL	I CAN'T SEE	RETIREMENT
ADAGE	EN LAI	LAGUERRE	PARTIES
ALGAL	ENOLA	LASTA	S MARIA
AMENDING	GARDENIA	LATE CALL	SET OUT TO
ASGARD	GENII	MAMAN	SMORGASBORD
ATMANS	GETTING A RISE	MIATA	STAR-CROSSED
BASK IN THE	OUT OF	MT AIRY	LOVERS
SUNSHINE	GOMEZ	OARLIKE	STEP-UP
BUILT-UP	GOT YOU	OBSESS	SUDOKU
DATA FILE	GRAMPS	PEASES	YAH MO

SUPER KAKURO

CONSTRUCTED BY EPOCH TIMES STAFF

Kakuro puzzles are like crosswords that use numbers instead of words. The goal is to fill the blank squares associated with a clue (called a "run") with the numbers 1-9 so that the numbers add up to the corresponding clues. Like Sudoku, digits in a run cannot repeat. When the grid is filled, the puzzle is complete.

WORK SPACE

SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD

SUPER KAKURO

4NUMBERS

- (19) - (13) x 9 - 36
- Hard 1
- (13) - (11) x 27 + 29
- Hard 2
- (7 + 2) x 4 - 2
- Easy 1
- 4 + 4 + 3 + 3
- Easy 2

SUDOKU

CONSTRUCTED
BY KANNAN SANKARAN

Fill in the boxes using numbers between 1 and 9 so that each column, each row, and each 3x3 square contain all nine numbers only once.

Hard

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

Easy

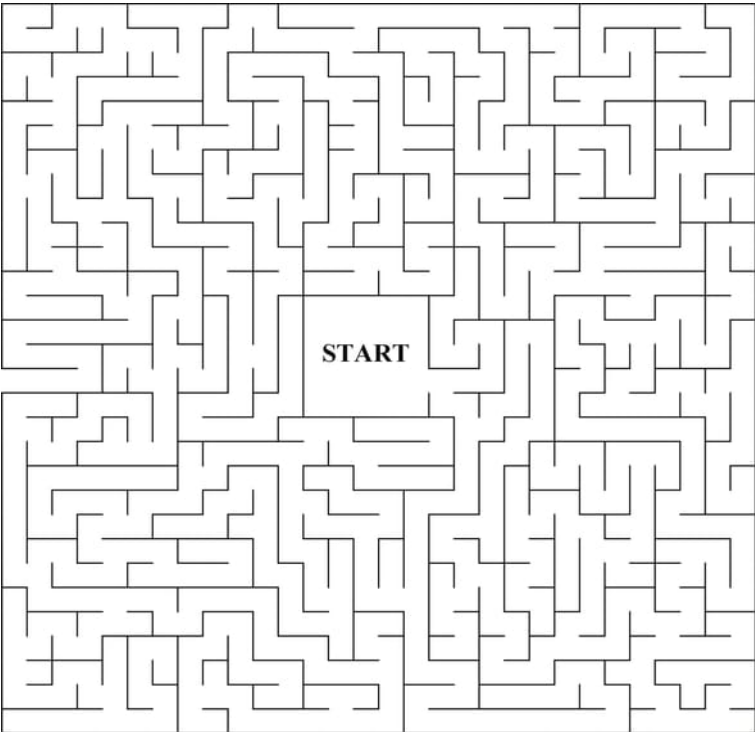
			3		7			5
	7		9	5			3	
3	5	6	8	4	1			
2			4		5		1	7
7		8		9				6
				1		9	2	3
1		7			4			
4	8				9			
		3		8		7	4	

EPOCH DOKU

CONSTRUCTED
BY EPOCH TIMES STAFF

10 +	8 +	1 -		11 +		4 /	11 +
		24 ×		30 ×	16 +		
3 -	7 +	7				13 +	
		3 /				7	2 /
25 +	6 +		28 ×		3 -		
		160 ×	7 ×	10 +	84 ×	8 +	
	4 /						5
			20 ×			18 ×	

EPOCH MAZE



SUPERSUDOKU

CONSTRUCTED
BY KANNAN SANKARAN

Fill in the boxes using numbers from 0 to 9 and letters from A to F so that each column, each row, and each 4x4 square contain all ten numbers and six letters only once.

	D	E	2				7				A	6	4		
	0		9	2			8			3					
F			C	4	D		B	2		1		3			
	B	A		6					7		5	2	1	9	
	7		D			E				B		9			
	3	2			C					8	4			A	
			B	9		D				7		6			
1		C		B	4				3		6	7	D	2	
	4	7	1	0		6				5	D		9		C
		D		1					E		9	8			
	2			D	B					0			E	6	
			0		7				8			B		1	
	9	6	4	F		1					8		3	7	
			A		0		6	9		7	3	F			2
					8			D			F	1		C	
		F	3	7				A				D	0	B	

CRYPTIC QUOTE

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z

11 16 1 11 15 3 26 7 23 16 20 5 26 9 9 11 16 4 16 26 17 9 12

15 22 9 11 16 1 15 7 20 18 14 2 5 17 3 3 16 7 1 14 20 20

22 14 2 18 16 19 17 26 20 10 26 17 5 16 22 15 7 1 15 2 18 16 7

26 2 18 26 18 3 14 7 26 9 14 15 2 14 2 1 14 2 9 16 7

24 15 11 2 4 17 7 7 15 17 25 11 5

KAKURO

CONSTRUCTED
BY EPOCH TIMES STAFF

Kakuro puzzles are like crosswords that use numbers instead of words. The goal is to fill the blank squares associated with a clue (called a "run") with the numbers 1-9 so that the numbers add up to the corresponding clues. Like Sudoku, digits in a run cannot repeat. When the grid is filled, the puzzle is complete.

Easy

			22	17	3	9	38		
	5	18						8	
41									
3									
			15	10	32	9			
	3	15							
41								13	
29									
			9						
18			12				7	15	
4					23				
						8			

JUMBLE

BY DAVID L. HOYT
& JEFF KNUREK

Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

CEKEH
PEMTT
RJAUGA
SLNOES

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WORK SPACE

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME
By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek



Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

SOLUTIONS

SUPERSUDOKU

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

SUDOKU: Easy

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

SUDOKU: Hard

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

EPOCH DOKU

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

JUMBLE

THE SAME
she loved her — JUST
sister could be irritating.
Even though her twin
Answers:
JAGUAR
LESSON
Jumbles:
admiration in winter.
cause for wonder and
summer will find equal
beauty of the world in
He who marvels at the

CRYPTIC QUOTE

EASY KAKURO

4	1	3							
18	8	9	6		1	6	8		
				15	5	1	3		
29	5	9	8	2		3	4	1	
41	2	7	5	4	6	9	8		
3	1	2							
41	4	5	9	2	7	8	6		
18	4	8	1	2	3				

Contact the Puzzle Master @: Feedback@EpochTimes.com

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Artists through the centuries interpret Virgil’s “Love conquers all.” **B5**

Florence Nightingale’s reforms began with resolve and compassion. **B6**

Gore Verbinski’s AI thriller is a wake-up call that hits close to home. **B7**

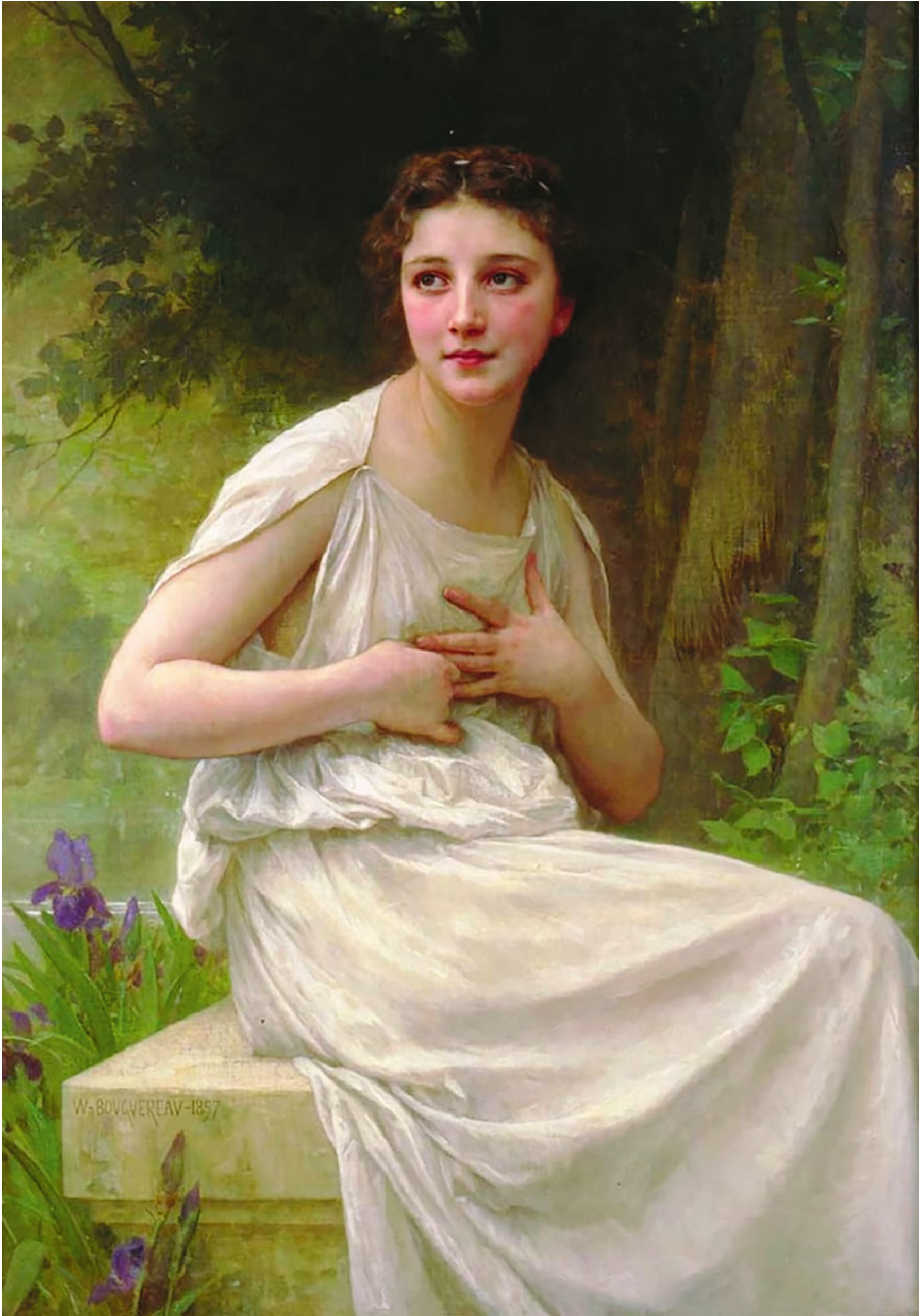


Arts&Culture

THE EPOCH TIMES

B1 TUESDAY, FEB. 24, 2026

PUBLIC DOMAIN



▲ “Reflexion,” 1897, by William-Adolphe Bouguereau. The solitude in this painting is also reflected in Shakespeare’s sonnet “When to the Sessions of Sweet Silent Thought.”

POETRY

Poems to Embrace and Reflect Upon

Opening our eyes to the wonder of so-called ordinary things

By Walker Larson

Have you ever been thrilled by the power and majesty of nature? Have you ever had your mind opened to new vistas by encountering a great work of art? Have you ever lost a friend or a loved one? If you’ve had any of these occurrences in your life, then the poems in this article, which deal with such experiences, will speak to you, inspire you, and maybe even comfort you.

I selected these poems for their brevity, perennial popularity, and accessibility, in order to form a kind

of introduction to classic English poetry for those who may not have had much exposure to it in the past. I recommend reading the poems slowly, maybe even out loud (poetry is meant to be heard), savoring each syllable, letting the beauty seep into you like sunshine. Then read the short commentary for a deeper understanding and appreciation.

‘Pied Beauty’
by Gerard Manley Hopkins

Glory be to God for dappled things –

For skies of couple-colour as a
brinded cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple
upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls;
finches’ wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced –
fold, fallow, and plough;
And áll trádes, their gear and
tackle and trim.
All things counter, original,
spare, strange;

Continued on B4

THE EPOCH TIMES

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HISTORY

With a Sword and Shield of Hope

Lincoln fought against his shortcomings rather than indulged them

By Jeff Minick

All human beings have flaws and weaknesses. Abraham Lincoln was a human being. Therefore, Abraham Lincoln had flaws and weaknesses.

This simple categorical syllogism is valid, yet we often forget that the historical luminaries we consider heroes struggled with private difficulties and imperfections just like the rest of us. Many Americans regard Abraham Lincoln not only as a hero who rose head and shoulders above the men and women of his time—literally as well as figuratively—but also as a near mythological figure from the past. He appears on the U.S. penny, the \$5 bill, and the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, which resembles a Greek temple. Historians and the public alike rightly regard him as one of the greatest of our presidents.

Yet when Lincoln entered the White House with the nation on the verge of civil war, we should remember that he carried his own troubles and defects.

Here are two pieces of this personal baggage.

Marriage

With some exceptions, like his choice of Andrew Johnson as his running mate in the 1864 presidential election, Lincoln was a good judge of character. He assembled a “Team of Rivals” for his cabinet made up of men with opinions at odds with his own and with each other. Lincoln had studied them and deemed each worthy of a place in the government.

Regarding marriage, however, his discernment was lacking. Perhaps he was blinded by love, confusion, or fear of marriage itself. Precisely why he and Mary Todd married remains a question unsettled by historians. Passion and emotion don’t come with cut-and-dried explanations.

High strung, flirtatious, and easily given to anger and scorn, Mary Todd was born into wealth, was well-educated and bright, and enjoyed high society and spending money. The couple became engaged in 1840. But just before the wedding in January 1841, Lincoln broke off the engagement, probably because of his growing doubts about the marriage and the disapproval of her family. Nearly two years would pass before the couple, having patched up their differences, were married in November 1842.

While Lincoln and Mary loved each other, it was a mismatch that brought both good and bad to his political life. His chief fault as husband was his frequent indifference to Mary’s troubles. Meanwhile, Mary was ambitious and pushed her husband to excel, but when he became president, she sometimes overstepped, demanding favors from other politicians and from members of the Lincoln cabinet. She was often lavish with money they didn’t have, spending it on expensive clothing and unnecessary accoutrements, and could become enraged when annoyed with Lincoln.

Col. Alexander McClure, who worked with Lincoln, later wrote of Mary: “In her figure and physical proportions, in education, bearing, temperament, history—in everything she was the exact reverse of Lincoln.”

Yet Lincoln had learned early on to play the diplomat with his wife. Michael Burlingame’s biographical book “The In-

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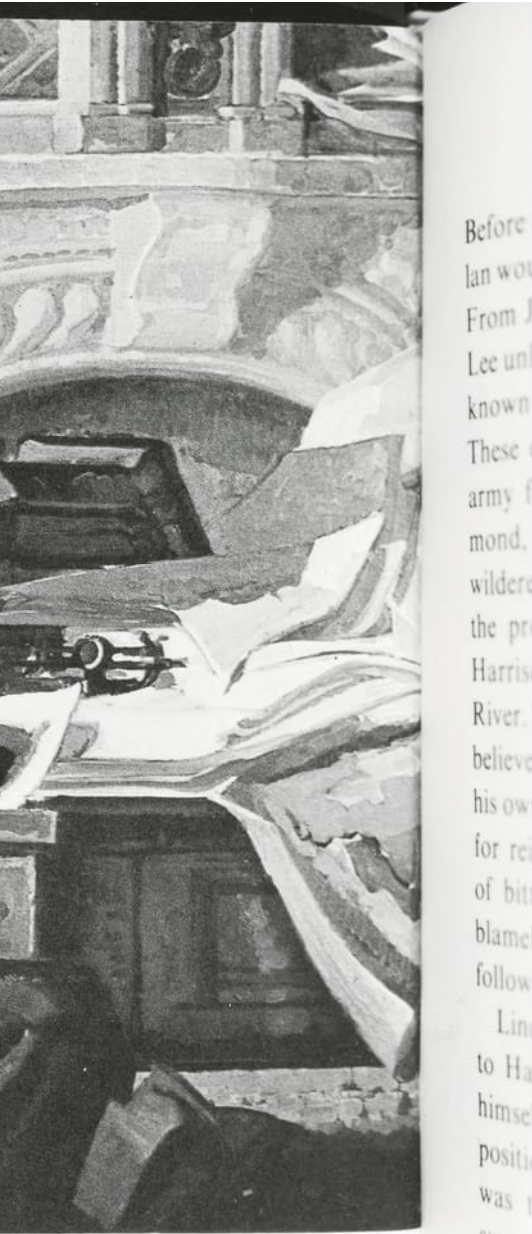
Washington, December 23., 1862.

Dear Henry

It is with deep grief that I learn of the death
of your kind and brave father; and, especially, that it
is affecting your young heart beyond what is common in such
cases. In this sad world of ours, sorrow comes to all; and, to
the young, it comes with bitterest agony, because it takes, then
unwarned, the ones we have learned to ever expect it. I am
anxious to afford some alleviation of your present distress.
Perfect relief is not possible, except with time. You can
not now realize that you will ever feel better. Do not
think so? And yet it is a mistake. You are sure to
be happy again. To know this, which is certainly true, will
make you some less miserable now. I have been fortunate
enough to know what I say; and you need only to believe
it, to feel better at once. The memory of your dear father, instead
of an agony, will yet be a pain sweet feeling in your
heart, of a pure, and holy sort than you have known before.
Please present my kindest regards to your affectionate mother.
Miss. Henry McCullough. Your sincere friend, A. Lincoln.

The letter of
condolence
from Abraham
Lincoln to Fanny
McCullough,
1862.

PUBLIC DOMAIN



ner World of Abraham Lincoln” records instances of his docility. Once, having granted her wishes “on a small matter in the White House, he told friends: ‘If you knew how little harm it does me and how much good it does her, you wouldn’t wonder that I am meek.’”

Deep Dark Depression
Closely associated with Lincoln’s broken engagement in January 1841 was a depression that rendered him so ill that he took to bed. From Jan. 13 to 19, he was absent from his seat in the Illinois legislature. He had experienced melancholia his entire life, but this time was different. His law partner William Herndon, who in his biography of Lin-



▲ Mary Todd Lincoln, circa 1861, in a portrait photo by Matthew Brady.

◀ An illustrated portrait of President Abraham Lincoln in his study, circa 1860s.

coln later described him as “crazy as a loon,” feared his friend was on the verge of suicide, though others consider that claim exaggerated.
That Lincoln suffered, however, is beyond doubt. On Jan. 23, he wrote to former law partner John Stuart: “I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would not be one cheerful face on the earth. Whether I shall ever be better I can not tell; I awfully forebode I shall not. To remain as I am is impossible; I must die or be better, it appears to me.”
With the help of friends, Lincoln recovered from this bout of depression. He would continue wrestling for the rest of his life with “The hypo,” as he called it, short for hypochondria. Friends and visitors to the White House frequently commented on the sadness that marked him, yet he never again suffered so devastating a setback. He had learned a valuable

Lincoln encouraged other sufferers of depression, telling them that even the blackest episode would pass.

lesson—he would “be better.”
He encouraged other sufferers of depression, telling them that even the blackest episode would pass. In late 1862, after learning of the dark sadness that had settled on a young acquaintance, Fanny McCullough, after the death of her father in the Civil War, he sent her words of advice that helped in her recovery:
“I am anxious to afford some alleviation of your present distress. Perfect relief is not possible, except with time. You can not now realize that you will ever feel better. Is not this so? And yet it is a mistake. You are sure to be happy again. To know this, which is certainly true, will make you some less miserable now. I have had experience enough to know what I say; and you need only to believe it, to feel better at once. The memory of your dear Father, instead of an agony, will yet be a sad sweet feeling in your heart, of a purer and holier sort than you have known before.”
In another letter to a stricken friend, he described her depression as “a misfortune, not a fault.”

A Lesson in Character
No matter how many accolades are heaped on men and women whom the world considers great, all of them are human, which means that all have troubles and interior difficulties. But the greatest of the great are the ones who, like Lincoln, fight against their shortcomings rather than tolerate or indulge them. He honored his imperfect marriage, keeping his equanimity when Mary railed against him or others. He fought off depression with the sword and shield of hope that the darkness would again become light.
“Would you have a great empire? Rule over yourself,” is a quote attributed to Publilius Syrus, a Roman slave and writer of aphorisms.
Lincoln ruled over himself.
Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminars of homeschooling students in Asheville, N.C. He is the author of two novels, “Amanda Bell” and “Dust on Their Wings,” and two works of nonfiction, “Learning as I Go” and “Movies Make the Man.” Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va.

“
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about this paper
hoping that they would
read it. ... Keep up the
good work. You will be
number one soon.

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▲ “Landscape With Cattle and Sheep,” circa 1852–58, by Constant Troyan. Minneapolis Institute of Arts. Poet Gerard Manley Hopkins allows us to see the wonder in the everyday.

POETRY

Poems to Embrace and Reflect Upon

Continued from B1

Whatever is fickle, freckled
(who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour;
adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty
is past change:
Praise him.

Gerard Manley Hopkins, a 19th-century English priest, possessed the gift of

true sight. That is, he was able to truly see things as they are, in all their glory, strangeness, rarity, and beauty. He found ecstasies of delight in the smallest details of the countryside and the city, human life and the natural world, and in things that many of us dismiss or do not notice.
For Hopkins, a deeply religious man, the vast variety, surprise, and richness of creation points back to a creator. This is perhaps one of poetry’s best uses: to open our eyes to the wonder of

Gerard Manley Hopkins, a 19th-century English priest, possessed the gift of true sight.

so-called ordinary things and experiences, and make us grateful again.
Hopkins’s use of rhythm and rhyme is distinctive. He even developed his own type of poetic meter called “sprung rhythm,” which partly accounts for his ability to jam-pack each line with sounds that pop and flare, just like the sudden and wide-ranging beauty he sees in the world. In addition to his lively rhythm, Hopkins uses alliteration (the repetition of sounds at the beginning of successive words) to add to the sprightliness and explosiveness that gives to this poem its exuberant, overflowing feel.
English professor William Harmon points out in “The Classic Hundred Poems: All-Time Favorites” that a number of Hopkins’s poems “take advantage of the rhyme between ‘thing’ and ‘wing,’ as though to repeat that, even in common objects, there dwells the capacity for flight.”

‘On First Looking Into Chapman’s Homer’
by John Keats

Much have I travell’d in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
That deep-brow’d Homer ruled as his demesne;
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene



▶ “The Apotheosis of Homer,” 1827, by Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres. The Louvre, Paris. Reading Homer widened John Keats’s vision of life.



PUBLIC DOMAIN

Keats, which explains what it is to discover a new world of intellectual and artistic possibility by using the metaphor of an explorer coming suddenly upon an unexpected sea, is a great depiction of what that early poetry class was for me: an invitation into the world of literature.

Of course, this poem can speak to experiences outside the realm of reading, too. Anyone who has touched something profoundly beautiful with the capacity to ignite longing and change your vision of life—whether that be a person, a painting, a landscape, an experience—knows what Keats is describing here.

‘When to the Sessions of Sweet Silent Thought’

by William Shakespeare

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought

I summon up remembrance of things past,

I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,

And with old woes new wail my dear time’s waste:

Then can I drown an eye, unus’d to flow,

For precious friends hid in death’s dateless night,

And weep afresh love’s long since cancell’d woe,

And moan th’ expense of many a vanish’d sight;

Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,

And heavily from woe to woe tell o’er

The sad account of fore-bemoaned moan,

Which I new pay as if not paid before.

But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,

All losses are restor’d, and sorrows end.

In this sonnet, the speaker is in a moment of solitude and silence, an opportunity for quiet and melancholy reflection. It’s a rare but meaningful moment that we’ve all experienced: The busyness of the day has subsided for a little, and we’re free to think about the bigger questions, the overall arc of our lives.

In this case, these thoughts bring a sadness as the speaker reflects on his life and all its disappointments. As Harmon notes, this kind of poem is known as a “complaint,” and it’s not hard to see why. The speaker gives a list of hardships beginning in line 3 that roughly goes like this: I’ve been disappointed in my goals, I’ve wasted a lot of my time, I’ve had many sorrows in my life, many of my friends have died, many faces have been lost to me, love itself has caused me pain. The speaker feels all those old sorrows welling up in his heart, and the grief is as acute as if they’d just occurred. The lines “heavily from woe to woe tell o’er/ The sad account of fore-bemoaned moan” include a great deal of assonance (repeated vowel sounds) that sound just like someone moaning: “Oh, oh, oh ...”

The speaker has reached an almost fever pitch of sadness here—but then there’s an unexpected shift. With the final two lines, a note of hope, happiness, and resolution enters the melody of the poem. This is called the “volta” or “turn” in a sonnet. In spite of everything the poet has lost, there is at least one thing he still retains: some face, some voice, some person who means the world to him. And just the thought of that dearest person—in this case, one of Shakespeare’s male friends—is enough to wipe away all those tears from his face. For us, that person might be a friend, a spouse, or even God. This poem reminds us that with such people in our lives, all is not lost.

Before becoming a freelance journalist and culture writer, Walker Larson taught literature and history at a private academy in Wisconsin, where he resides with his wife and daughter. He holds a master’s in English literature and language, and his writing has appeared in The Hemingway Review, Intellectual Takeout, and his Substack, The Hazelnut. He is also the author of two novels, “Hologram” and “Song of Spheres.”



ALL IMAGES IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

▲ “Omnia Vincit Amor, or The Power of Love in the Three Elements,” 1809, by Benjamin West. Oil on canvas; 70 3/8 inches by 80 1/2 inches. Maria DeWitt Jesup Fund, 1923. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.

BEHOLD THE BEAUTY

The Power of Love

In a world full of temptation, ‘Love Conquers All’

By Lorraine Ferrier

Painters from the Renaissance onward imparted ancient wisdom on their canvases. Many great artworks emerged from the wellspring of Virgil’s “Eclogues,” a collection of 10 pastoral poems that the Roman composed between 42 B.C. and 37 B.C.

One quote from the “Eclogues” has inspired artists time and again: “Omnia vincit amor” or “Love conquers all.”

Virgil’s quote inspired 19th-century American artist Benjamin West’s mythological painting “Omnia Vincit Amor, or The Power of Love in the Three Elements.” In the painting, West (1738–1820) depicted the strengths of love and marriage in taming earthly desires. He conveyed the message using traditional symbols, such as the four classical elements that ancient philosophers believed classified all substances in the physical world. West rendered the Roman goddess of love, Venus, and her son Amor, commonly known as Cupid, in the heavens. West included their traditional emblems: Venus with her doves and Cupid with his bow and quiver full of arrows. Cupid’s arrows inflicted love or passion on his targets.

Hymen, the winged god of marriage, stands beside the pair in a strong, protective stance. He holds three red threads that lead to different creatures lurking in the shadows. The creatures represent three classical elements that relate to all creatures of the sea, land, and sky. There’s the eagle (air), lion (earth), and the hippocampus (water), which

is a mythical sea creature often described as being similar to a seahorse.

According to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Venus, the winged Amores, and Hymen’s flaming bridal torch represent the fourth element of fire. Venus’s fire is love; Amores’s fire is passion.

Fire traditionally symbolized either destruction or intellect.

In the painting, sunlight—often seen as divinity, intellect, and the transience of life—peeks through the storm clouds, illuminating Venus triumphant. The goddess resists all temptations. West seems to have rendered mischievous Cupid (the god of erotic love), trying to steal her belt known as the “Girdle of Venus,” which according to legend inspires desire. Both Venus and Hymen—love and marriage, respectively—eliminate the wild emotions of profane love.



▲ “The Triumph of Love,” circa 1545, by Titian. Oil on canvas; 34 3/4 inches diameter. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK.

The Enduring Appeal of ‘Love Conquers All’

Other artists used similar elements seen in West’s painting but interpreted “Omnia vincit amor” in different ways. In Renaissance Venice, Titian (circa 1488–1576) depicted a jubilant Cupid riding a fierce lion. He readies his bow and arrow as if he’s about to take aim. This was a common motif in the Renaissance, when lions symbolized pride and wrath. Titian therefore expressed the power of love (Cupid) conquering these emotions.

In Renaissance Pisa, Orazio Riminaldi (1593–1630) expressed “Omnia vincit amor” in his striking painting that’s often referred to as “Love Winning Over the Arts.” Over the centuries, the painting has been titled “Love Ruler of All” and “The Talent of Virtue.” Riminaldi depicted Cupid with an array of objects, including weaponry, literature, and sheet music. The Uffizi Galleries website states that Riminaldi’s painting is an “exhortation not to give in to passion but to practise the arts and other human activities ... in order to achieve harmony.”

Virgil’s “Omnia vincit amor” in its entirety reads like a motto to live by: “Omnia vincit amor: et nos cedamus amori (Love conquers all; let us, too, yield to love!)”

◀ “Amor Vincit Omnia,” 1624–1625, by Orazio Riminaldi. Oil on canvas; 55 7/8 inches by 44 1/8 inches. Palatine Gallery, Pitti Palace, Florence, Italy.



Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies

When a new planet swims into his ken;

Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes

He star’d at the Pacific—and all his men

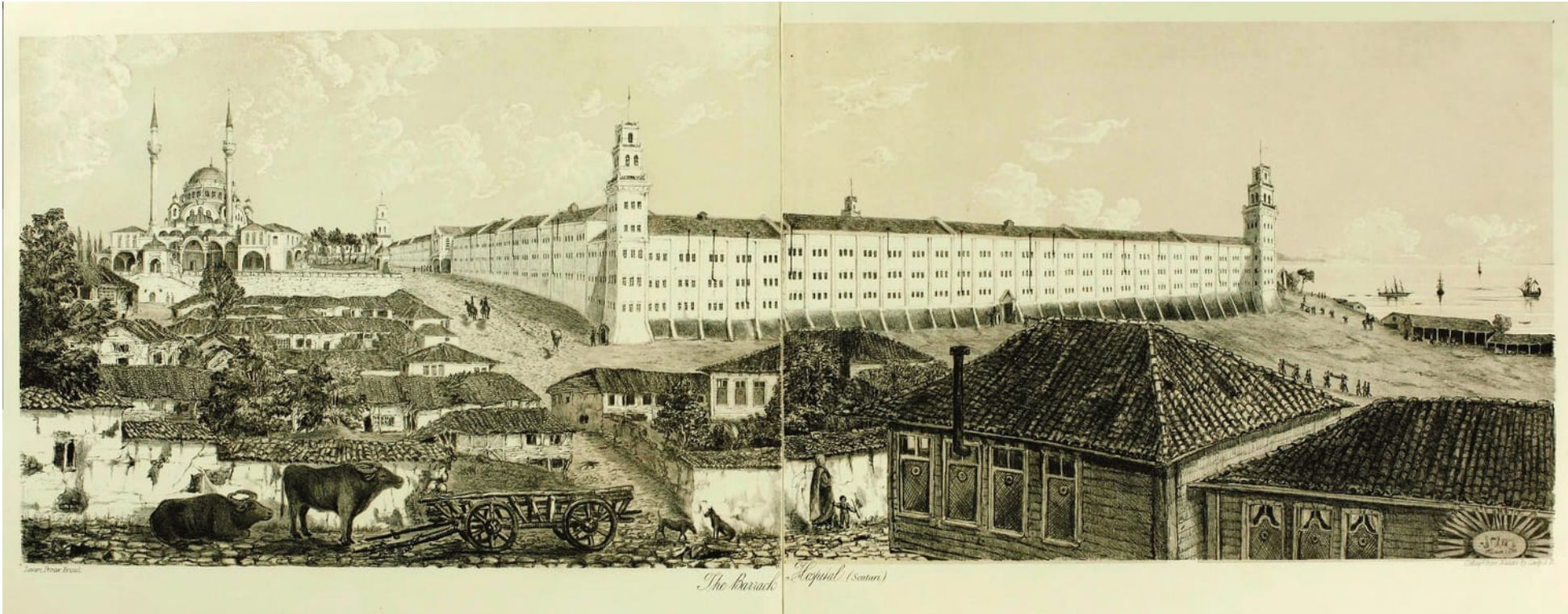
Look’d at each other with a wild surmise—

Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

This poem requires a brief explanation to fully appreciate it. The poet, John Keats, first compares the experience of reading ancient poetry to being a traveler in the ancient Mediterranean, a traveler who has heard that the Greek poet Homer rules a vast area of that sea. This is true in the sense that Homer is often considered the greatest and most influential of the ancient poets. But, Keats says in lines 7 and 8 that he never understood Homer’s greatness until he read George Chapman’s translation of Homer from Greek to English. Then, says Keats, he felt like someone discovering a new planet or a new ocean—a witness to some fresh and vast reality of truly epic proportions (worthy of Homer himself).

I first read this poem in a college class that I was fortunate enough to take with my father as the instructor. It was an introductory class on English poetry, through which I was introduced to a whole new world of art and its power to speak to the mind and the heart. I think this poem by

► An illustration of the Scutari Barracks and Hospital (now known as Selimiye Barracks), 1857, by Lady Alicia Blackwood.



HISTORY

Florence Nightingale: Lighting the Way

The woman who introduced sanitation to modern nursing

By Andrew Benson Brown

“Conceit and Nursing cannot exist in the same person, any more than new patches on an old garment,” wrote Florence Nightingale in her first annual address to the nurses of the Nightingale School at London’s St. Thomas’ Hospital in 1872. Shy and socially awkward, Nightingale remained humble despite her personal achievements. Though she’s most remembered today for the sanitation reforms she instituted during the Crimean War (1853–1856), her influence continues to be felt in a surprising number of ways.

Horrors in the Crimea

In 1854, Nightingale arrived at the Scutari Barracks (now the Selimiye Barracks) in Uskudar, Istanbul. As barracks for the British army, it was insufficient. As a hospital, it was horrific. The barracks had been built over a large sewer, so the well water was foul. Strong winds blew sewer fumes through the unventilated, unheated building. The square was piled with filthy heaps of trash. Because the intended latrine towers were overfilled, open tubs in the wards functioned as makeshift latrines. However, the orderlies never had time to empty either. There were no rooms, no beds, and no medicine to treat the wounded, yet sick soldiers poured in from across the Black Sea. The barracks was built to house about 1,200 people, but in one day more than 1,700 patients arrived,

and at its peak, 4,000 patients were housed there at one time. As she later wrote in her groundbreaking book, “Notes on Nursing,” much of the disease-related suffering was caused by poor hygiene, not disease symptoms. She wrote that the term “nursing” has traditionally signified “the administration of medicines and the application of poultices,” when “it ought to signify the proper use of fresh air, light, warmth, cleanliness, quiet, and the proper selection and administration of diet.” With these principles in mind, Nightingale began the overwhelming task of transforming the fetid barracks into a place where healing was possible. Today, we would think of the problems in the Scutari Barracks in terms of germs. But basic forms of germ theory had yet to be generally accepted. While Nightingale wasn’t thinking in terms of germs, she did have ideas about how to organize the hospital to implement and prioritize cleanliness.

A Holistic Approach

Though Nightingale’s remedies to these sanitation problems are now the stuff of legend, the hospital staff didn’t see it that way when she arrived. The male doctors resented her proposed changes as an attack on their profession. Gen. Sir John Burgoyne noted that she wasn’t “amiable in ordinary intercourse with her equals or superiors,” and that “she likes to govern.” Essentially, the men in authority felt that she was bossing everyone around. Nightingale went about purchasing



► Despite her infirmities, Florence Nightingale (C) mentored and taught generations of women to be effective, professional nurses.

much-needed supplies. She acquired clean linens and shirts, soap, and kitchenware. She set her nurses to changing sheets regularly, scrubbing floors, and washing their hands—a new concept at the time. She opened the closed windows to increase ventilation and ordered the sewers flushed out. Patients were given fruit to eat. Thanks to these simple improvements, the hospital’s mortality rate fell from 60 percent to 2 percent. This holistic philosophy was blended with modern mathematical approaches. She systematized record-keeping practices at the hospital, employing a team to collect meticulous data on every dying, injured, and sick patient who came through.

The Lady With the Lamp

After criticizing her communication skills with superiors, Gen. Burgoyne noted that “she bestow[ed] all her tenderness upon those who depend upon her.” She was known for her kindness and empathy to wounded soldiers. In the evenings, she would sit, listen, and talk with them. “Always sit within the patient’s view,” she once wrote, “so that when you speak to him he has not painfully to turn his head round in order to look at you.” Every night, Nightingale made her rounds holding a paper lantern. This image of her was later immortalized by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in his poem “Santa Filomena”:

*Lo! in that house of misery
A lady with a lamp I see
Pass through the glimmering gloom,
And flit from room to room.
And slow, as in a dream of bliss,
The speechless sufferer turns to kiss
Her shadow, as it falls
Upon the darkening walls.*

When she returned to London, “the Lady with the Lamp” was celebrated as a national hero. She was showered with awards, and Queen Victoria gave her a brooch of gold and diamonds.

A Nurse in Need of Nursing

Within a few years of her return, Nightingale began to suffer from poor health. Her symptoms included chest pains, headaches, and fatigue. During her time abroad, she had contracted what was then called Crimean Fever. It could have been brucellosis, a bacterial infection caused by contact with infected animals or animal products. Others speculate that she suffered from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. Whatever the cause, for the next 50 years she lived as a bedridden recluse. Despite her ill health, Nightingale continued to influence current events.

In 1859, she published “Notes on Nursing.” In 1860, St. Thomas’ Hospital in London opened the Nightingale Training School for Nurses, the first institution of its kind. A little over a decade later, Nightingale began submitting annual addresses to the trainees. During this time, she put her experience with statistics to effect. She teamed up with experts to create charts that visualized medical data to nonspecialists. The most famous of these is the “polar-area diagram,” or “Nightingale Rose diagram,” a statistical method for illustrating the causes of death among soldiers. She convincingly argued to skeptical authority figures that more soldiers died from preventable diseases than battlefield wounds and that an army of healthy soldiers is more efficient.

Shy and socially awkward, Nightingale remained humble despite her personal achievements.

She also pressured policymakers in British Parliament to improve their data-collecting methods on public health. For her contributions to the field, the Royal Statistical Society elected her as its first female member.

Death and Legacy

Nightingale died of heart failure in 1910, at age 90. Her last wish was to be buried in a family grave close to her home. She declined an offer to be interred at Westminster Abbey. Today, the Nurses’ Memorial Chapel in the abbey is dedicated to Nightingale. Each year, the International Red Cross awards the Florence Nightingale Medal to nurses who demonstrate “exceptional courage and devotion” to victims of wars or disasters, and to pioneers in public health and education. In her lifetime, her name lent itself to a good deal of merchandise. Nightingale’s image appeared on postcards, lithographs, and posters. People named their babies after her. Florence Nightingale dolls even appeared, a trend that continues today. Mattel recently introduced a Barbie in her honor. In her lifetime, though, the only thing she ever officially allowed her name to be used for was the “Nightingale Fund.” It was established to found the nursing school at St. Thomas’ Hospital. The small lamp she carried has lit the future of public health.

Andrew Benson Brown is the outreach director for the Society of Classical Poets and the author of “Legends of Liberty,” an epic poem about the American Revolution.

► British nurse Florence Nightingale, circa 1860.



PUBLIC DOMAIN



A Film With Its Heart in the Right Place

An earnest but low-budget rendition of the Book of Revelation

By Mark Jackson

Director Simón Delacre, founder of Caravel Films, is the triple-threat screenwriter-director-producer of “The Apocalypse of Saint John.” It’s his first feature. Delacre is Argentine and a devout Catholic.

Written by the Apostle John around A.D. 95, while he was in exile on the Greek island of Patmos, the Book of Revelation is the final book of the New Testament. It’s a prophetic vision of the “end times” and the ultimate triumph of the Creator over evil.

‘The Apocalypse of St. John’
Delacre claims that the script of “The Apocalypse of Saint John” follows Catholic exegetical interpretation from the teachings of the early church fathers, along with the ideas of Cardinal Louis Billot, Father Leonardo Castellani, B. Holzhauser, Josef Pieper, John Henry Newman, and Monsignor Straubinger. It attempts to reestablish them in light of the present times.

“The Apocalypse of Saint John” is basically a linear narrative of the text, in docu-fiction style, accompanied by painted, drawn, photographic, and video images that illustrate what the narrator is saying.

The images themselves are accompanied by CGI and AI tweaking, which allows them to morph and stretch ever so slightly (and slowly), creating movement, presumably with intent to hold attention. This presentation is also interspersed with dramatic re-creations, the main one being John as an old man, on a deserted

island, putting pen to parchment.

The Issues

The problem that tragically undermines the entire project (and I was really looking forward to this one) is that much of it is excessively repetitive. For example, the visual of the parchment, with each of its seven red wax seals getting broken (accompanied by over-the-top dramatic crunchy noises), is played over and over and over again. It soon grates.

Even more grating is the monotony of the same narrator who, throughout the one hour and 50-minute runtime, utilizes a three-note, formulaic, sing-songy mantra that has the opposite effect of drawing the audience in.

Stalin was once thought to be the antichrist. He was. He just wasn’t the only one.

The production value, while understandably underfinanced, rankles. One scene from Revelation 4:4 depicts the kings with “crowns of gold.” In a work as mystical and esoteric as “The Apocalypse,” it should be self-evident that the 24 elders seated on thrones around God’s throne have golden halos. Instead, we see a group of old men wearing white sheets, and the type of gold crowns you might buy a 10-pack of for \$6.39 from Temu for your 5-year-old and his friends to wear at his birthday party.

Many visuals of men in armor wielding swords are too Monty Pythonesque for comfort. Again, a couple million extra dollars in the budget might have helped, but this low-rent approach diminishes the magic. One would like to be able to



St. John (Ricardo Castro) writes down his visions on the island of Patmos, in “The Apocalypse of St. John.”

take seriously these rare occasions where the content is sublime. This raises the question—if you can’t say it well, should you say it at all? Is a cheap rendition perhaps ever so slightly sacrilegious?

The film claims to offer clear and engaging explanations of the visions and to illuminate their theological meaning through the lens of ancient Christian tradition. But the quality of the rendition conspires to shed exactly zero light for me on this topic. Consistent churchgoers may have better luck.

On the other hand, Delacre claims that the screenplay was given the stamp of approval by priests and theologians, and praised by Bishop Athanasius Schneider and Cardinal Juan Sandoval Íñiguez.

Alongside the theatrical release, Caravel built its own rental-and-purchase platform, and the film is promoted through official channels on X, Facebook, and Instagram. It has apparently been released in more than 17 countries, with strong traction across Latin America, and especially in Mexico, Colombia, Peru, and Argentina. The film ends as “Part One,” setting up a sequel titled “O Dragão e as Duas Bestas” (“The Dragon and the Two Beasts”), which doesn’t have a release date yet.

The Bigger Picture

Before the final judgment, there will be endless cycles of war, famine, disease, and so on, with an antichrist coming onto the world stage proclaiming they (not God) can solve all of our problems. That’s exactly what communism is—the promise of a godless utopia.

People throughout history have looked

at Revelation and thought it spoke precisely to their time, because these cycles are repetitive. Stalin was once thought to be the antichrist. He was. He just wasn’t the only one.

Ultimately, Revelation can drive people to repentance. The chaos and misery happens so that people can come to God because the goal is the salvation of humanity.

As a side note, The Epoch Times’ updated version of “How the Specter of Communism is Ruling Our World” will hopefully be released to coincide with Delacre’s “The Dragon and the Two Beasts.” Both works will speak to the fiery red dragon of Revelation. It should come as no surprise to The Epoch Times readership that for our times, “The Specter” and the apocalyptic red dragon are one and the same, embodied by the Chinese Communist Party.

‘The Apocalypse of Saint John’

Director
Simón Delacre

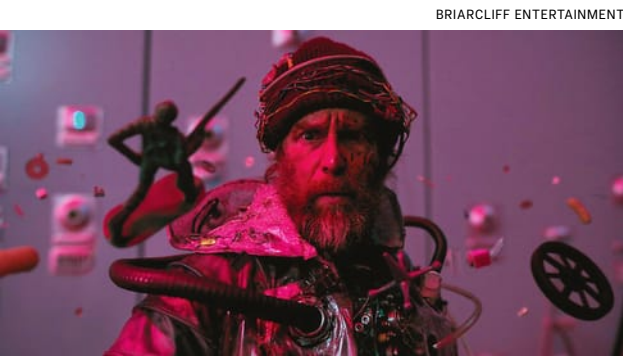
Starring
Ricardo Castro,
Miguel Angel Marchessi,
Héctor Hugo Larriera,
Ricardo Alanís,
Iván Biagosh

Running Time
1 hour, 50 minutes

Not Rated

Release Date
Feb. 15, 2026

★★★★★



FILM REVIEW

A Stinging, Funny Indictment of AI

Hopscotching between the past, present, and future

By Michael Clark

My first takeaway after hearing about the premise of “Good Luck, Have Fun, Don’t Die” (“Good Luck”) was: OK. It’s just another movie about the real dangers of Artificial Intelligence (AI) that will be labeled as implausible science fiction. It can’t and never will happen. AI doesn’t pose a threat to life as we know it. It will only help mankind. We’ll be fine.

Humanity as a collective has a painfully short attention span. As far back as 1927 (“Metropolis”), the movie industry has pointed out how awful AI would be if it ever came to fruition. Well over 100 movies and almost a century later, we’re still willfully ignoring the message.

Directed by Gore Verbinski and written by Matthew Robinson, “Good Luck” is the cinematic equivalent of smacking someone upside the head with a cast iron skillet and hoping it makes an impression. As the film replaces the expected dour doom and gloom with absurdist, observational humor, “Good Luck” makes AI practically impossible to ignore.

Man from the future (Sam Rockwell), in “Good Luck, Have Fun, Don’t Die.”

Los Angeles, 10:10 p.m.

The movie opens in the present day at 10:10 p.m. in a Los Angeles diner. Showing up out of thin air is the Man From the Future (Sam Rockwell) donned with suicide bombs, questionable hygiene, and a see-through raincoat. He declares that he’s been there 117 times before, and the result is always the same: He fails and the world ends.

Little by little, Future Man begins to chip away at the diner’s collective disbelief. He convinces a half dozen or so of them (who have already done so before but don’t realize it) to join him in an effort to try and stave off the inevitable—which, again, will likely fail.

Give him credit. Future Man doesn’t oversell the chore at hand. If anything, he leans into the overtly bleak. You really can’t blame him. Trying to save the world this often and coming up short every time might turn one into a glass-half-empty pessimist. Yet he forges on.

AI is doing everything it can to render us inconsequential and disposable.

Opening Salvo

This scene goes on for 13 minutes before a quick title card and no opening credits. It is the first of around 10 chapters that hopscotch between the past, present, and future.

Second up features couple Mark (Michael Peña) and Janet (Zazie Beetz). They are teachers at the same high school who are going through a slight rough patch. Every one of their coworkers is petrified of the students at the school—and for good reason.

These veritable teen zombies are glued to their phones; some are doom-

scrolling, some gaming, and all having zero interest in actually getting an education.

Once the students have their phones rendered inoperative, they become expectedly feral and violent. This isn’t much of a stretch. Check out some videos online of teens being unwillingly separated from their devices and the reactions are astonishingly similar.

Non-Spoiler Spoiler Ahead

The next past segment is spent in the company of Susan (Juno Temple), the mother of a boy killed during a school shooting. When offered the opportunity to assuage her grief (at the great taxpayers’ expense, of course), Susan opts in, yet eventually she regrets her decision. This scenario is revisited and is updated in the final 15 minutes.

Easily the hardest-hitting and emotionally rewarding subplot of the movie involves Ingrid (Haley Lu Richardson). Future Man dubs her “Princess” because of her garb presented in the opening scene. Ingrid is more than willing to join Future Man, but he initially refuses to accept her offer for reasons not fully explained until late in the third act. Ingrid also manifests physical maladies when within short proximity of Wi-Fi and cellphones.

For Verbinski, “Good Luck” is his first feature in close to a decade and is arguably the finest of his career. He achieved huge box office success with the first three “Pirates of the Caribbean” installments, which I found technically impressive but creatively wanting. They are as deep and thoughtful as the theme park ride that spawned them.

What’s It Like?

“Good Luck” is closer in spirit to Verbinski’s more pointed and equally sarcastic “The Weather Man” (2005) and the animated “Rango” from 2011.

While watching an advance screener for the movie, I noted similarities to “12 Monkeys,” “Lucy,” “Looper,” “Animal House,” “Groundhog Day,” “Fight Club,” and, oddly enough, “Patton”

because of a pointed musical score similarity.

It is my last wish to come off as a “Karen” or a “Debbie Downer,” but I believe “Good Luck” is closer to future (or current) science than “science fiction.” Some may believe that allowing AI into our lives will make everything easier, more fun, and beneficial, but I strongly disagree. It is displacing basic human contact and is quickly removing our ability to make common-sense decisions.

AI is not helping us. It’s doing everything it can to render us inconsequential and disposable.

The heavy infusion of observational humor makes “Good Luck” an easier bitter pill to swallow. It ends on an upbeat note, but the message is chillingly clear, blunt, and beyond cautionary.

Originally from the nation’s capital, Michael Clark has provided film content to over 30 print and online media outlets. He co-founded the Atlanta Film Critics Circle in 2017 and is a weekly contributor to the Shannon Burke Show on FloridaManRadio.com. Since 1995, Clark has written over 5,000 movie reviews and film-related articles. He favors dark comedy, thrillers, and documentaries.

‘Good Luck, Have Fun, Don’t Die’

Director
Gore Verbinski

Starring
Sam Rockwell,
Juno Temple,
Zazie Beetz,
Haley Lu
Richardson

Running Time
2 hours, 14 minutes

MPAA Rating: R

Release Date
Feb. 13, 2026

★★★★★

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

People Without a Country to Call Home

Political WWII refugees face danger and loss of everything dear to them

By Rudolph Lambert Fernandez

Director John Cromwell’s film “So Ends Our Night” set in 1937 Europe at the height of Nazism in Germany, depicts how political refugees differ markedly from economic refugees.

First, many political refugees often for-sake present or potential prosperity in their home country. Educated or wealthy Jews may flee because of their ethnicity, and others because of their beliefs, such as influential Germans fleeing because they’re anti-Nazi.

As Germany prepared to annex Austria, many Germans were made stateless. This included non-Jew conscientious objectors, who were thrown into concentration camps in Germany, and Jews, who were suddenly deprived of citizenship. Both groups lost their passports (either seized or forcibly surrendered), were declared illegals, and faced arrest or deportation to other European countries. In these other countries, they had to secure fake foreign passports at great cost or be deported back to Germany to face further persecution.

Middle-aged war veteran, anti-Nazi Josef Steiner (Fredric March) escapes a concentration camp and befriends fellow prisoner Ludwig Kern (Glenn Ford). When German authorities catch Kern and Steiner without passports, they deport Kern to Czechoslovakia and Steiner to Austria.

Steiner longs for his wife, Marie (Frances Dee), back in Germany. But he’s now rootless and ends up working in an Austrian amusement park as a mind reader, mechanic, barker, and dishwasher.

In Czechoslovakia, Kern, a Jew, falls for another Jewish refugee, Ruth Holland (Margaret Sullavan). Together they brave hardships in Austria, France, Switzerland, and Germany.

Nazi agents tempt Kern and Steiner with the superficial freedom of a passport, if only they’d betray themselves or their friends. Both pay a price for the authentic freedom they seek: the freedom to choose according to their conscience.

Cromwell’s film, inspired by anti-Nazi German writer Erich Maria Remarque’s novel “Flotsam,” shows how refugees are like flotsam, adrift in a seemingly shoreless ocean or washed up on a beach, belonging to no one, claimed by no one. Remarque himself fled Germany, first for Switzerland and later for America, where he became a naturalized citizen. His novel shows how common opposition against totalitarianism makes kindred spirits of entire strangers.

Barring a few flashbacks, Cromwell tells his story linearly. Shorn of melodrama, it mirrors the tediousness and tenuousness of refugee existence: some characters on edge and exhausted from fleeing regularly, others investing time and energy in ensuring that they stay that way.

Freedom Disguised

Ford, at 25, is convincing enough as a 19-year-old and portrays the drifting that Jews felt at the time. Watch for a fleeting flashback where, in happier times, he and his dad sneak up on his mom to present her with birthday gifts. March is superb as a man of compassion, character, conviction, and courage. And Sullavan is vulnerable as a woman caught between betrayals from her past (her earlier boyfriend turns out to be a bigot) and a future (with the idealistic Kern) that promises to reward her trust.

In one scene, German agent Brenner (Erich von Stroheim) presents the captive Steiner with a choice. He’ll restore Steiner’s passport if he’ll only betray the accomplices who helped him escape the concentration camp. If he complies, he can go back to Ma-



▲ (L-R) Lilo (Anna Sten), Ruth Holland (Margaret Sullavan), Ludwig Kern (Glenn Ford), and Josef Steiner (Fredric March), in “So Ends Our Night.”

rie in Germany and travel across Europe as he pleases. Steiner’s refusal to comply suggests that Brenner’s poser isn’t what it seems: a choice between freedom and captivity. Instead, it’s a choice between captivity of one kind and captivity of another kind.

Brenner coaxes, “The necessity of the state is above the code of the individual.” Steiner’s rebuke says that under totalitarianism, freedom is not what the state says it is, but what its upright individuals say it is. So, Steiner exercises his freedom by refusing to pick from Brenner’s so-called choices. To Steiner, freedom lies not in choice itself but in choosing love, courage, and sacrifice above everything else.

In one flashback, Steiner finds Marie in a crowded marketplace and sneaks up behind her without drawing the suspicion of Nazi spies and informants. Whispering as he walks, he begs her to use his political views as an excuse to divorce him, to protect herself from Nazi victimization. Marie keeps walking ahead, listening but not daring to speak or lock eyes with him for fear of exposing him. Yet her pained face speaks volumes.

Holland explains to Kern why she’s afraid of intimacy because she’d rather not tie

someone else down, whose fate then turns out to be as uncertain as hers. Kern tells her that the worse off they are and the less they have, the more important it is to find companionship and to find someone who cares—“just one.” Kern understands this better when Steiner, discovering that Marie is sick back home, decides to risk capture again just to see her.

You can watch “So Ends Our Night” on YouTube.

Rudolph Lambert Fernandez is an independent writer who writes on pop culture.

‘So Ends Our Night’

Director
John Cromwell
Starring
Fredric March, Glenn Ford,
Frances Dee, Margaret Sullavan
Not Rated
Running Time
1 hour, 57 minutes
Release Date
Feb. 27, 1941
★ ★ ★ ★ ★



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