



TIPS & TRICKS
Managing
Jet Lag
TRAVEL B1

THEME PARKS
Children's
Fairyland
TRAVEL B4



KANSAS CITY
America's Biggest
Small Town
TRAVEL B5

SAN DIEGO
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▲ A packaging factory in Belcamp, Md., on June 25, 2025.

Behind
America's
New Industrial
Revolution

US outpacing many
advanced economies in
growth and productivity

By Emel Akan

WASHINGTON—The U.S. economy grew faster than many predicted over the past year, fueled by strong corporate investment, technological innovation, deregulation, and tariffs, among other factors.

A surge in investment in artificial intelligence, combined with President Donald Trump's pro-growth policies over the past year, has further strengthened the country's economic momentum, according to analysts.

The United States is "at the doorstep of a new industrial

revolution," said Stoyan Panayotov, a financial adviser and founder of Babylon Wealth Management.

He said the country's strong capital base, skilled workforce, and shareholder-friendly environment make it more attractive to investors than other markets. In recent years, the United States has outpaced other advanced economies, especially in Europe, where growth has nearly stalled.

Recently, S&P 500 companies have reported earnings that beat market expectations.

Continued on A9

Mortgage Rates Hit 3-Year Low,
Boosting Buying Power

By Bill Pan

Mortgage rates have continued their downward drift, falling below 6 percent this week to their lowest level in more than three years.

The average rate on a 30-year fixed mortgage dropped to 5.98 percent for the week ending Feb. 26, down from 6.01 percent the prior week, according to Freddie Mac's weekly survey. A year ago, the 30-year rate averaged 6.76 percent.



▲ Homes in Fontana, Calif., on Sept. 17, 2025

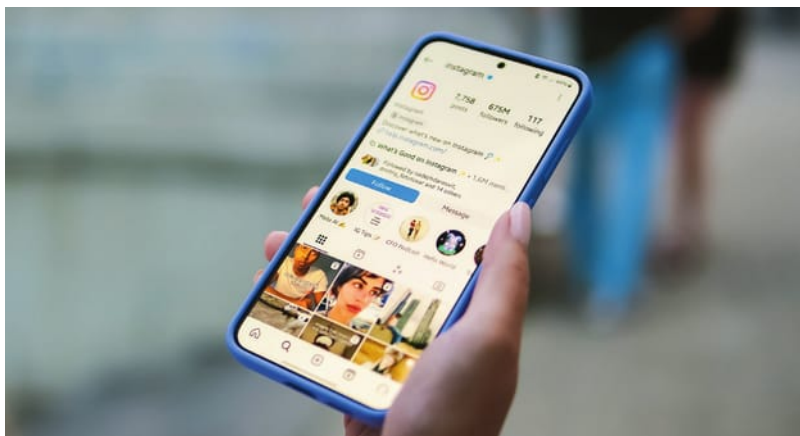
The most recent time the benchmark rate was below 6 percent was September 2022, Freddie Mac said.

Mortgage rates peaked at a little less than 7.8 percent in October 2023 and have drifted down since, offering some relief to buyers who have struggled with affordability—and to homeowners who have been reluctant to sell because they're locked into much lower mortgage rates.

Although rates today are still higher than they were in the early years of the COVID-19 pandemic, some experts say breaking the 6 percent threshold could draw more buyers back into the market and begin to weaken the "lock-in" effect that has kept housing inventory tight.

"For the first time in three and a half years, the 30-year fixed-rate mortgage dropped into the 5 percent range, falling even lower

Continued on A9



Expert Testifies in Social Media
Addiction Trial

By Beige Luciano-Adams

LOS ANGELES—In the third week of a historical jury trial considering whether social media companies have engineered their platforms to addict young people despite knowing the potential harms, attorneys sparred over what a young plaintiff's therapy records might reveal about her so-

cial media use and mental health.

So far, the jury has heard theoretical arguments and seen forensic evidence, in the form of internal documents, largely centered on what the companies knew and when, and whether their actions, or lack thereof, constitute a "willful and conscious disregard for safety."

On Feb. 25, testimony from a

Continued on A2

Chinese Influence Network Targeting Trump, Others, Identified

By Catherine Yang

Researchers have uncovered a network of more than 330 social media accounts linked to China that targeted U.S. President Donald Trump, Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, human rights organizations, and other countries

to push pro-Chinese Communist Party (CCP) narratives, according to a Feb. 26 policy brief.

The Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), a think tank based in Washington, discovered the network coordinating to push these narratives between December 2025 and February

2026 across X, YouTube, Tumblr, Blogger, and Quora.

The researchers identified six "clusters" of accounts that focused on different narratives, which were aimed at attacking political figures seen as acting against the CCP's interests.

Continued on A10

**The largest
nexus included
151 accounts
that targeted
audiences in the
United States.**

Third US-Iran
Talk Ends

WORLD A11



HK Court
Overturns
Jimmy
Lai's Fraud
Conviction

WORLD A13



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Is Social Media Addiction Real? Expert Testimony Takes Center Stage in Landmark Trial

Continued from A1

licensed family therapist inched closer to the personal story at the heart of the case—and highlighted a gray area underlying its core claims.

That story belongs to a 20-year-old California woman identified in court records as “K.G.M.” or “Kaley G.M.,” who says she began using social media apps as a child, became addicted to them, and as a result suffered serious harms—including body dysmorphia, depression, and suicidal ideation.

In this bellwether trial, which will determine how thousands of related personal injury cases play out, K.G.M. has been a stand-in for a generation that came of age in the digital era—and for an unprecedented youth mental health crisis that grew alongside it.

But even as some experts say instances of social media addiction are skyrocketing among young people, the phenomenon is new enough that consensus about its meaning and implications is far from clear, diagnosis and treatment are not standardized, and a sense of its scope remains out of focus.

Dr. Anna Lembke, a psychiatrist and medical director of addiction medicine at Stanford University School of Medicine, testified as an expert witness for the plaintiff that about 40 percent of patients at the school’s adolescent recovery clinic—which historically treats mostly alcohol and drug abuse—are now presenting with social media addiction.

“There is a wealth of peer-reviewed literature and other publications from authoritative bodies validating that people can get addicted to social media,” Lembke said.

A 2025 Columbia University study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* reported high or “increasingly addicted” use of social media among 40 percent of nearly 4,300 children who were surveyed over four years, starting at age 8.

Both high and increasingly addictive use patterns, researchers noted, were associated with worse mental health and suicidal behaviors.

A growing body of literature, according to Lembke, supports claims that addictive, excessive, or problematic use of social media can increase or cause depression; that it can worsen negative comparison among adolescents and negatively affect body image, especially among girls; and



▲ Supporters of the lead plaintiff, “K.G.M.,” outside the Los Angeles Superior Court during a trial concerning social media on Feb. 25, 2026.

that excessive use can lead to self-harm and suicidal ideation and displace sleep, among other impacts.

There is a wealth of peer-reviewed literature and other publications from authoritative bodies validating that people can get addicted to social media.

Dr. Anna Lembke, medical director of addiction medicine, Stanford University School of Medicine

The brains of children and teens in particular, Lembke said, are more malleable, developing in the years from childhood to age 25 the neurological “scaffolding” they will have for the rest of their lives. Impacts on brain development from addictive drugs and behaviors, including problematic use of defendants’ social media platforms, can have profound consequences.

Instagram and parent company Meta, YouTube and parent company Google, TikTok and its parent company ByteDance, as well as Snapchat and parent company Snap Inc. are named as defendants in K.G.M.’s case; Snap and TikTok settled privately days before the trial began, but they remain in related cases.

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg, Instagram head Adam Mosseri, and YouTube vice president of engineering Cristos Goodrow have all told the court that their platforms are not designed to be addictive—and more broadly, that they do not believe that clinical social media addiction exists.

Victoria Burke, a licensed family therapist in California, initially diagnosed K.G.M. with generalized anxiety disorder at age 13, but after noting that her patient’s anxiety was largely focused on social acceptance and perceived physical flaws, she narrowed her diagnosis to social phobia and body dysmorphic disorder.

According to Burke, who was still a trainee when she treated K.G.M. for about six months in 2019, the plaintiff described using her smartphone to self-soothe and avoid social interactions at school. Creating digital art on social media, K.G.M. told her, was one of the few ways she felt “seen.”

Burke observed that K.G.M.’s sense of self was closely tied to her social media use and that she experienced distress and loneliness when it was taken away.

“It could really make or break her mood coming into a session,” Burke said.

Under cross-examination, Burke acknowledged that although she has seen social media cause functional impairment in clients’ lives—a critical diagnostic criterion for mental disorders—she has never concluded that any of her adolescent clients were addicted to social media.

This is mainly because social media addiction is not recognized as an official disorder.

“There is currently no social media

addiction diagnosis in our [diagnostic manual],” she said.

However, she noted that there are other ways to capture the phenomenon—it may show up as obsessive-compulsive disorder, social phobia, or trauma, for example.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), now in its fifth edition, is published by the American Psychiatric Association and was last updated in 2022. It is the authoritative guide—a clinician’s bible.

When deposed in May 2025, Burke said she had not formed any opinion about whether social media contributed to any of K.G.M.’s mental health issues.

“My opinion today is different,” she told the court on Feb. 25.

“I believe that it was a contributing factor,” she said. “I do not believe it was causation.”

Her trepidation about word choice, she explained, stems from the fact that she is limited to clinical observation in the absence of an official diagnosis.

“I’m not going to come to a conclusion or say I know everything; I’m going to say this is what I’m observing, this is my clinical insight. ... Someone else may have different clinical insight,” she said.

Andrew Stanner, an attorney for Meta, suggested that family issues, educational difficulties, and bullying that K.G.M. experienced, as recounted in sessions with Burke, were responsible for her mental health issues.

He framed her use of social media as a positive experience, saying that social media platforms were rare places where she could connect with others and gain recognition for original edited music videos she posted.

“It was supportive in some ways,” Burke said of K.G.M.’s social media use. “I saw both benefits and areas where it was getting in the way.”

That was seven years ago. Her understanding of the impacts of social media among adolescent users, she suggested, has evolved.

When asked whether she had any idea how much time K.G.M. spent on Instagram, Burke said she did not.

“I didn’t assess for it,” she said. “I would assess for that now.”

Mark Lanier, attorney for the plaintiff, argued that the fact that social media addiction is not an official disorder in the DSM does not mean that people are not addicted to social media.

“There was a time in that book when bipolar disorder wasn’t listed,” he said. “That doesn’t mean there weren’t people who were bipolar, it just hadn’t made it into the handbook.

“Sometimes it just takes a while for the DSM to catch up.”

Appeals Court Allows ICE to Access Taxpayer Data

By Troy Myers

A federal appeals court has allowed Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to access taxpayer information.

In a 3–0 decision on Feb. 24, the court unanimously disagreed with several nonprofit organizations’ argument that ICE violated the Administrative Procedure Act, which governs how federal agencies develop regulations.

Judge Harry Edwards of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, who wrote the opinion for the court, said ICE did not engage in the type of final action subject to the act and that the agency otherwise followed federal restrictions on data sharing.

“Furthermore, if we find, as we do, that the ‘best reading’ of the statute does not support Appellants’ position, then no agency action may countermand the court’s judgment,” the judge wrote in the ruling.

The court also cited a “straightforward” and “crystal clear” statute that outlines when it is acceptable for the IRS to disclose tax return information.

“[The statute’s] text unambiguously authorizes IRS to disclose taxpayer

address information,” Edwards wrote.

“This statutory text alone is enough to resolve this case. Appellants urge us to depart from the text of the statute. We decline the invitation because we find no merit in their arguments.”

Under the statute, a request for tax return information must come from the head of a federal agency, the agency inspector general, or Department of Justice officials.

The request must also have a specific reason for why the information is relevant.

Only if all requirements are met under the statute can the IRS disclose information.

“There are no special limitations on IRS’s handling of addresses,” the judge wrote. “When the statute’s language is plain, the sole function of the courts is to enforce it according to its terms.”

The decision focused on whether the nonprofits, Centro de Trabajadores Unidos and others, were entitled to the preliminary injunctive relief sought for preventing ICE–IRS data sharing.

It came after a lower court in Washington denied the groups’ request.

The Department of Homeland Security

(DHS) did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Neither did the plaintiff groups.

In the lawsuit, the nonprofits also argued the IRS’s actions in data sharing with ICE were arbitrary and capricious, but the federal appeals court rejected this argument, citing an agreement between the IRS and DHS in April 2025 that outlined procedures on data sharing.

“IRS agreed to review each ICE request for completeness and validity,” the appeals court said.

“If the statutory requirements are satisfied, IRS will search for the last known address for each individual in the request and provide that address to ICE.”

Both the IRS and DHS had agreed that if ICE’s requests for taxpayer addresses were invalid or unsatisfactory, the IRS would not give up the information.

In March 2025, the appellants filed a temporary restraining order in a district court on the IRS’s sharing of taxpayers’ addresses with ICE.

That initial request was denied. The

groups then moved for a preliminary injunction, which was denied.

The activist and nonprofit groups then sought the federal appeals court’s review.

ICE’s use of taxpayer information has not only been met with legal challenges; in June 2025, the agency’s request for records on 7.6 million people was denied by the IRS because it did not meet disclosure requirements.

Another request, just weeks later, for records on 7.3 million people was also rejected.

On June 27, ICE requested records for 1.2 million people. The IRS returned information on about 47,000 noncitizen taxpayers.

Multiple other lawsuits have been filed to prevent the revenue service from sharing information with ICE.

In one such instance, a Massachusetts federal judge on Feb. 5 blocked DHS from using taxpayer data for immigration enforcement purposes.

The preliminary injunction in this case will remain in effect as litigation plays out in court.

[The statute’s] text unambiguously authorizes IRS to disclose taxpayer address information.

Judge Harry Edwards, U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit

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U.S. SOUTHERN COMMAND/SCREENSHOT



▲ U.S. military personnel lower themselves from a helicopter onto Motor/Tanker Veronica during a boarding and seizure operation in the Caribbean Sea on Jan. 15, 2026.

JONATHAN ERNST/POOL/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



▲ Secretary of State Marco Rubio speaks to reporters after meeting CARICOM leaders in Basseterre, St. Kitts and Nevis, on Feb. 25, 2026.

Rubio Calls for Coordinated Action on Caribbean Gangs

By Chris Summers

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio met leaders of several Caribbean nations on Feb 25 and called for deeper cooperation on tackling the region’s gangs and cartels. “We are interested in rebuilding and constructing a new dynamic in this Western Hemisphere in which we partner with all of you on the issues we share in common,” Rubio told a private meeting of CARICOM, an organization made up of 15 Caribbean nations.

During the meeting in Basseterre, capital city of St. Kitts and Nevis, he said Caribbean countries and the United States need to cooperate more to tackle heavily armed drug trafficking groups.

“We’ve also watched with alarm at the level of armament that these groups have,” Rubio said. “We recognize that many of these groups are buying weaponry from the United States and that we are committed and continue to work very hard with our law enforcement agencies to shut that down.”

In May 2025, Rubio designated two Haitian gangs, Viv Ansann and Gran Grif, as foreign terrorist organizations. Last month, the U.S. State Department revoked the visas of two unidentified members of Haiti’s Transitional Presidential Council and their immediate families because of their alleged involvement in gangs.

Rubio told the CARICOM leaders, “I hope you have seen, both in the case of Haiti but in other dynamics, that we have not shied away, not just from designating groups for what they are—these are terroristic organizations—but even individuals who are responsible

for being supportive of them.”

The American-led Caribbean Basin Security Initiative, launched in 2010, has sought to develop the capabilities of 13 nations in the region to “disrupt illicit trafficking and transnational crime,” according to a Feb. 25 factsheet from the U.S. State Department.

Rubio’s comments to CARICOM came two days after the United States struck a suspected drug boat in the Caribbean, killing at least three alleged narco-terrorists.

Starting in September 2025, the U.S. military launched strikes against suspected drug smuggling boats in the Caribbean Sea and the eastern Pacific Ocean. The Trump administration has stated that drug trafficking vessels pose a national security threat.

Boat Incident Is ‘Aggressive Provocation,’ Russia Says

The Cuban Ministry of the Interior stated on Feb. 25 that people on board a boat from Florida entered Cuban waters and opened fire on a Cuban patrol before the patrol returned fire, killing four people and injuring six. The commander of the Cuban vessel was also injured, according to the ministry.

The incident happened roughly one nautical mile to the northeast of El Pino canal in Cayo Falcones, and the injured parties “were evacuated and received medical assistance,” according to a translation of Cuba’s statement.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova described the incident as “an aggressive provocation by the United States aimed at escalating the situation and detonating a conflict,” according to Russia’s state-owned news agency TASS.

Rubio told reporters that the Cuban

regime had stated that the boat was registered in Florida and said that the United States was “tracking that down.”

“I’m not going to speculate. I’m not going to opine on what I don’t yet know. But we’re going to find out exactly what happened here, and then we’ll respond accordingly,” he said.

Last month, the Trump administration threatened to impose new tariffs against any country that sells oil to Cuba’s communist regime.

On Jan. 3, Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro, a long-time ally of the Cuban regime, was captured and taken to the United States by special forces, where he was arraigned on an indictment that accuses him of narco-trafficking in collusion with the Tren de Aragua cartel.

Maduro’s replacement, Delcy Rodríguez, has stopped oil and gas exports to Cuba, and the United States has put pressure on Mexico to stop supplying Havana.

Last year, Venezuela was Cuba’s largest oil supplier, providing the Caribbean nation with 26,500 barrels per day, roughly one-third of Cuba’s daily needs. Mexico came in second, with 5,000 barrels per day.

Rubio told reporters on Feb. 25 that Venezuela was free to sell oil to private companies in Cuba, just not the regime-controlled Grupo de Administración Empresarial S.A.

Rubio: Regime Responsible for Suffering

Rubio said that while he accepted that the Cuban people were suffering, “it is the authorities there in that government who are responsible for that.”

He also praised the Venezuelan interim leader but said there still needed to be fair and democratic elections.

“I will tell you this without any apology or without any apprehension: Venezuela is better off today than it was eight weeks ago,” Rubio said. “The new interim authorities, led by Delcy Rodríguez, have done things that eight or nine weeks ago

would have been unimaginable. They have released political prisoners; they have closed Helicoide, which is their most infamous prison of all.”

While Trump has stopped short of explicitly calling for regime change in Havana, he said last month that the actions of the Cuban regime represent an “unusual and extraordinary threat” to U.S. national security.

Cuba is not a member of CARICOM but maintains cordial ties with the organization.

I will tell you this without any apology or without any apprehension: Venezuela is better off today than it was eight weeks ago.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio

The meeting’s host, Saint Kitts and Nevis Prime Minister Terrance Drew, said CARICOM should be a conduit for dialogue over Cuba’s future.

“A destabilized Cuba will destabilize all of us,” Drew said.

Before the meeting with Rubio, Jamaican Prime Minister Andrew Holness appealed for a collective response to the crisis in Cuba.

“Humanitarian suffering serves no one. Apart from our fraternal care and solidarity with the Cuban people, it must be clear that a prolonged crisis in Cuba will not remain confined to Cuba,” Holness said Feb. 24. “It will affect migration, security and economic security across the Caribbean basin.”

He called for “constructive dialogue between Cuba and the United States aimed at de-escalation, reform, and stability.”

Reuters contributed to this report.

Vance Announces New Phase of Fraud Investigations, Withholds \$259 Million in Medicaid Funds From Minnesota

By Travis Gillmore

\$23 BILLION

A single investigation netted \$23 billion in fraudulent billing, according to Oz.

WASHINGTON—Vice President JD Vance announced new efforts to combat fraud nationwide during a news conference on Feb. 25 in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building with Dr. Mehmet Oz, administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

The federal government is temporarily deferring \$259 million in Medicaid payments to the state of Minnesota, citing widespread fraud. Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz has 60 days to respond.

“What we’re doing is we are stopping the federal payments that will go to the state government until the state government takes its obligations seriously to stop the fraud that’s being perpetrated against the American taxpayer,” said Vance, chairman of the White House anti-fraud task force.

Minnesota already paid providers using state funds, but federal reimbursements are now on hold.

Vance described schemes uncovered in Minnesota in which individuals “set up sham businesses ... [and] set up sham clients.”

The estimated cost to taxpayers of fraud across the country totals approximately \$300 billion annually, according to officials.

“A lot of people are getting rich off the generosity of American taxpayers,” he said.

“But more fundamentally and more importantly than that, it means that there are kids in Minnesota who deserve these services, who need these services, and they’re not going to those kids; they’re going to fraudsters in Minneapolis,” Vance said. “That’s unacceptable, and that’s the sort of thing that we’re cutting off with this action today.”

He said President Donald Trump’s administration has prioritized the elimination of waste and abuse nationwide.

“And we are going to start very aggressively in the administration, cracking down on the people and the organizations that are defrauding Americans,” Vance said.

Oz said the action targeting Minnesota is meant to spur compliance, with announcements regarding other states coming soon.

“This quarter-billion-dollar deferment is hopefully going to get on the radar screen of the state of Minnesota and

make sure they are responsive to our requests,” he said.

Walz strongly objected to the federal action, charging the Trump administration in a post on X with subjecting states under the control of Democrats to punitive treatment.

“This has nothing to do with fraud,” he said. “This is a campaign of retribution. Trump is weaponizing the entirety of the federal government to punish blue states like Minnesota.”

The administrator also announced a six-month moratorium on all new enrollments nationwide for durable medical equipment supplies, including prosthetics and orthotics, among other items.

Oz said the move is needed to curb widespread fraud and abuse in the industry. Southern Florida is currently a hotbed for illegitimate medical supply billing, he said, with twice as many durable medical suppliers as McDonald’s locations in the region.

A single investigation netted \$23 billion in fraudulent billing, according to Oz, savings that will benefit American seniors by about \$132 each this year.

The estimated cost to taxpayers of fraud across the country totals approximately \$300 billion annually, according to officials.

“We have to take these crimes seriously

and treat them as seriously as if they were bank robberies, because they’re more dangerous than bank robberies,” Oz said. “People get hurt during them.”

He cautioned against relying on prison sentences as sufficient to address the issue, saying that many of the offenders are foreign nationals who flee the country.

“Instead, we’re launching the largest action against fraud that we’ve ever taken,” Oz said. “The money is not going to ever leave the building again. We’re going to start draining the swamp of the crooks that have inhabited it and are defrauding us.”

With supplies and resources limited as a result of the fraudulent activity, he emphasized that Americans in need are missing out on opportunities.

Oz described one scheme in which parents were paid \$1,000 per child to falsely enroll them as autism patients, as a result of which the federal government paid millions of dollars for services that were never provided.

Another instance involved a provider that submitted claims for 450 days in which the provider billed for more than 24 hours per day.

The announcement comes a day after Trump singled out the states of California, Maine, and Minnesota for allowing rampant fraud and abuse to occur.

Administration officials are also asking the public to help identify potential fraud and wasteful spending affecting the federal government. Anyone with information is asked to call 1-800-HHS-TIPS or visit CMS.gov/fraud.



MADALINA KILROY/THE EPOCH TIMES



▲ The U.S. Capitol on Feb. 21, 2026.

Federal Judiciary Asks Congress for Authority to Manage Its Own Courthouses

By Savannah Hulsey Pointer

The federal judiciary has asked Congress to pass legislation giving it the power to manage its own courthouses. If the request is granted, the change would shift that authority from the General Services Administration (GSA), which is part of the executive branch. The Judicial Conference, which is the rule-making body for the federal courts, sent a draft bill on Feb. 24 to administra-

80 PERCENT
GSA-owned buildings account for more than 80 percent of the federal court system's space.

tion and congressional leaders, proposing a gradual shift in property-management authority. The group cited a decade's worth of deferred maintenance, noting that even emergency repairs, including repairs of storm damage, can take years to complete. "Federal courthouses are in crisis. Without immediate action, the problems will continue to worsen," Judge Robert J. Conrad Jr., the director of the Admin-

istrative Office of the U.S. Courts, said in a statement in support of the request. "Action is needed now to reverse a downward spiral of critical-system failures, long-term underfunding of repairs, security risks, and climbing costs." Called the Space and Facilities Management Effectiveness Act of 2026, the bill would allow the judicial branch the same property authority held by the other two branches of government. Currently, GSA is the judiciary's landlord, and the Architect of the Capitol manages property needs for the legislative branch. "The transfer would support the Judiciary's function as a co-equal branch of the federal government, by enabling it to manage properties critical to the Judiciary's constitutional mission," the U.S. Courts said in a statement. GSA-owned buildings account for more than 80 percent of the federal court system's space. Currently, the Judicial Conference is paying \$1.3 billion to GSA in rent annually, and the group is responsible for the upkeep of the federal buildings and support offices. In the legislative package, the Judiciary Conference cited GSA staff cuts and reorganization as a cause for delay. Late in 2025, hundreds of GSA employees were asked to return to work after initially losing their jobs because of changes made by the Department of Government Efficiency. Marianne Copenhaver, GSA associate administrator for strategic communications, told The Epoch Times in an emailed statement that GSA officials "disagree with the characterization that the federal courthouse portfolio is in 'crisis' due to mismanagement." "While aging federal buildings present well-known challenges, their narrative omits critical context regarding our lack of access to GSA's Federal Building Fund to address delinquent maintenance," she said. She said it was the GSA's position that "the American taxpayer is best served by the Judiciary focusing on the rule of law while GSA continues to focus on the federal real estate portfolio."

According to the Judiciary Conference, it was slow to seek the new authority, formally known as real property authority. The conference first pursued the authority in 1989, and again in 2006. In both cases, the group voiced concerns about courthouse management and maintenance. In 1989, Congress did not pass the necessary legislation to transfer such authority to the Judicial Conference.

The Judiciary Conference first pursued real property authority in 1989, and again in 2006.

In 2006, the plea was made to Congress again, this time amid growing concerns about courthouse security after 9/11. Complaints about delays and underfunding still did not prompt Congress to transfer real property authority to the courts, and the GSA maintained operational management. The judicial branch has said that if real property authority is granted to the Judicial Conference, it will be able to complete repairs faster and more effectively than under the current system, reducing the backlog. The Judicial Conference is seeking action from Congress to transition property management to properties "critical to the constitutional mission of the Judiciary." "We see this as an opportunity for constructive realignment, not separation," Conrad said. "GSA would ultimately shed \$8.3 billion in delinquent maintenance it lacks the funding and resources necessary to remediate. "Real property authority will empower the Judiciary to coordinate directly with Congress on critical courthouse needs. It will ensure that the Judiciary can control and maintain the buildings it occupies to safely fulfill its constitutional mission more effectively."

Hochul Demands Trump Administration Refund \$13.5 Billion in Tariff Payments to New Yorkers

By Chase Smith

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul sent a letter to U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent on Feb. 26 demanding that the federal government refund approximately \$13.5 billion in tariff payments to New Yorkers following a Supreme Court ruling that struck down President Donald Trump's tariff policies as unlawful. Hochul called on the Treasury Department to coordinate with other federal agencies and "immediately formulate and implement a plan to refund all tariff proceeds." The Democratic governor cited estimates from the Budget Lab at Yale showing that the average New York state household has faced roughly \$1,751 in added costs since the tariffs were enacted in 2025. "The Supreme Court has now said these tariffs are flat out illegal," Hochul said on Feb. 26 during a visit to VOS Selections, a small business in New York City whose owner, Victor Schwartz, was a plaintiff in the lawsuit that led to the Supreme Court decision. "It was done in violation of law. New

Yorkers have paid more than they should have under an illegal scheme that the Supreme Court has now struck down." In her letter to Bessent, Hochul said the tariffs had driven up prices on everyday goods, raised supply and equipment costs for small businesses, and added uncertainty for the state's farming industry. "Having unlawfully seized billions of dollars from American people and businesses, the federal government should now do the right thing: give it back," she wrote. The governor said the \$13.5 billion refund would cover household costs and would be separate from claims individual businesses may file. "Small businesses already pay a lot in federal and state taxes," Hochul said. "And now to have this extra tariff thrown on them and their customers is just a kick in the teeth and they don't deserve that." Trump imposed varying tariffs on most of the world's countries on what he called "Liberation Day" shortly after returning to the White House last year. The move drew legal challenges from businesses and some states, culminating

in the Supreme Court ruling last week that the tariffs imposed under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act were unlawful. Hochul joins Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker and California Gov. Gavin Newsom, who last week called on the administration to issue refunds following the court ruling.

Having unlawfully seized billions of dollars from American people and businesses, the federal government should now do the right thing: give it back.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul

The White House dismissed the refund demands. "President Trump used tariffs to actually deliver where Democrats could only talk, so naturally Democrats are



SPENCER PLATT/GETTY IMAGES

resorting to gathering more meaningless popcorn headlines—pathetic but unsurprising," White House spokesman Kush Desai said in a statement. Penn Wharton Budget Model economists have estimated that more than \$175 billion in U.S. tariff collections are subject to potential refunds nationwide. Bessent has said the issue of tariff refunds will be addressed by the lower courts.

Reuters contributed to this report.

▲ New York Gov. Kathy Hochul in New York City on Feb. 10, 2026.

CDC Advisers to Discuss COVID-19 Vaccine Injuries, Long COVID

By Zachary Stieber

Advisers to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) director will go over COVID-19 vaccine side effects and so-called long COVID, according to a Federal Register notice published on Feb. 26. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), which provides vaccine-related advice to the CDC's director, will discuss "COVID-19 vaccine injuries and Long-COVID" during its next meeting on March 18 and March 19, the notice states. ACIP will also go over its methodology for making recommendations to the CDC. The recommendations are non-binding, but are usually adopted by the agency's head or, if the position

is vacant, the Health and Human Services (HHS) secretary. After going over the three subjects, the advisory committee may vote on them. Further details have not yet been made available. ACIP's chairman did not respond by press time to a request for comment. The meeting will take place at CDC headquarters in Atlanta. People can also watch the meeting online. In its last meeting, in late 2025, a majority of ACIP members voted to advise the CDC to stop recommending hepatitis B vaccination for newborns born to women who tested negative for the disease. Jim O'Neill, at the time the HHS deputy secretary and the CDC's acting director, accepted the recommendation.



▲ A COVID-19 vaccine.
STÉPHANE OUZOUNOFF/HANS LUCAS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

In mid-2025, HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. replaced all ACIP members, citing conflict-of-interest issues. Some members voted on vaccines even though they had recently received or were receiving money from companies that make the vaccines, The Epoch Times found. Organizations and states have alleged in two separate lawsuits that the remaking of the panel violated federal law because Kennedy did not follow proper processes in selecting the new members and because many of the new members oppose vaccines. Both filings seek a reversal of the panel reconstitution and of recent changes to CDC vaccine guidance. "Public health decisions must remain grounded in truth and facts," California Attorney General Rob Bonta said

in a statement on Feb. 24 after the latter lawsuit was lodged. "That's why, for the 59th time, I'm taking the Trump Administration to court. My fellow attorneys general and I cannot sit on the sidelines while lives are put at risk and our laws are broken." A federal judge in the other case is still mulling whether to enter an injunction blocking the updates to the panel and vaccine recommendations. "By law, the health secretary has clear authority to make determinations on the CDC immunization schedule and the composition of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices," HHS said in a post on X this week. "The CDC immunization schedule reforms reflect common-sense public health policy shared by peer, developed countries."



Police Officer Shot in Alleged Antifa Attack Testifies in Texas Trial

Continued from A1

Antifa is modeled after a militant group that worked as the violent arm of the Communist Party of Germany starting in the 1930s. Some symbols from the original group are still used by the movement today, such as the raised-fist salute.

Alvarado police Lt. Thomas Gross, who was shot after responding to a 911 call to the Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility, testified that he saw a guard chasing a person dressed in black with a face covering.

Gross said he got out of his vehicle and saw another person dressed in black carrying a rifle.

“At this point, the scene is becoming extremely chaotic,” he said. “I believe I was getting ambushed.”

Loud noises and shouting could be heard during a recording from the police officer’s vehicle after he got out, including someone yelling twice, “Get to the rifles.”

Detention supervisor Cindy Harp testified that she and officer Dekeithon Reedy were both unarmed as they went outside to investigate the loud noises.

After leaving the building, she heard someone with a bullhorn speaking in Spanish. Then, she heard someone tell her that she should be proud of herself for working at a detention facility.

She could not clearly see who was there because they were all dressed in black and wearing masks, but she testified that she heard roughly four people talking.

Harp told the intruders that they were on private property and needed to leave.

“I was in shock, and I’m kind of nervous because nobody’s supposed to be there,” she testified.

Harp said she and Reedy started running toward the parking lot after hearing loud popping noises. They saw a police car heading toward them and noticed two people dressed in black. As the car pulled up, Reedy yelled to the police of-



▲ Eldon B. Mahon United States Courthouse in Fort Worth, Texas, in this file photo.

ficer and pointed at the two figures.

Almost immediately after the officer got out of the vehicle, gunfire erupted, Harp said.

With her voice breaking, she described an assailant shooting the police officer, whom she heard say, “Oh, God.”

“I was in fear of my life,” Harp testified. “I thought I was fixing to die.”

Landmark Case

A win by the prosecution in this case could open the door to go after additional members believed to be Antifa, said Andrew Arthur, a Center for Immigration Studies fellow in law and public policy who oversaw prosecutions of alien terrorists and spies while serving at the Immigration and Naturalization Service general counsel’s office.

Arthur said proving that the defendants are members of Antifa could be difficult. One way would be to show communications, such as text messages, between members concerning Antifa, he said.

“The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn’t exist,” Arthur said. “You know, the same thing can be said about Antifa.”

I was in fear of my life. I thought I was fixing to die.

Cindy Harp, supervisor, Prairieland Detention Center

The Ku Klux Klan, the Weather Underground, and the Symbionese Liberation Army are all examples of loosely organized groups, he said.

“Terrorist organizations don’t generally give out ID cards or issue uniforms,” he said.

During opening arguments on Feb. 24, Assistant U.S. Attorney Shawn Smith told the jury that defendant Benjamin

Song shot 11 times at police and detention officers until his rifle jammed.

The alleged Antifa cell, which wore “black bloc” attire—dark clothing and face coverings—had more than 50 firearms, including AR-15-style rifles that had been modified to shoot in rapid bursts, according to authorities.

They used an encrypted messaging app and monikers in group chats to hide their identities, according to the indictment.

Some allegedly used handheld radios, and at least one had a “Faraday bag” used to block law enforcement from tracing cellphones; others conducted reconnaissance and discussed what to bring to the “riot,” according to the criminal complaint.

The alleged Antifa members called the plan a “noise protest” to show solidarity with illegal immigrants inside the Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention center, according to the criminal complaint.

Cameron Arnold (also known as Autumn Hill), Zachary Evetts, Bradford Morris (also known as Meagan Morris), Maricela Rueda, and Song face the most serious charges of attempted murder and discharging a firearm during a crime of violence, in addition to providing material support to terrorists.

Other defendants facing lesser charges include Savanna Batten, Elizabeth Soto, Ines Soto, and Daniel Rolando Sanchez-Estrada.

All have pleaded not guilty.

Defense attorneys attempted to distance their clients from the shooting, with several saying that their clients were not present when it occurred. They have painted the incident as a political protest.

Attorney Christopher Tolbert, who represents defendant Batten, said, “In America, we don’t prosecute our citizens for their political beliefs.”

Five individuals already pleaded guilty to terrorism-related charges for supporting Antifa members in the shooting on Nov. 19, 2025. Several are expected to testify for the prosecution.

Nathan Baumann, 20; Joy Gibson, 30; Seth Sikes, 22; Lynette Sharp, 57; and John Thomas, 32, each entered guilty pleas to one count of providing material support to terrorists during their federal court hearing.

DHS Says ICE Agents Will Not Be Stationed at Polling Places During Midterms

By Tom Ozimek

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said on Feb. 25 that immigration enforcement agents will not be stationed at polling locations during this year’s midterm elections, while leaving the door open for targeted operations in response to specific threats.

Heather Honey, deputy assistant secretary for election integrity at DHS, made the assurance during a Feb. 25 virtual briefing with secretaries of state and representatives from multiple federal agencies, according to statements from state officials who participated in the call.

Arizona Secretary of State Adrian Fontes, a Democrat, said Honey stated clearly that ICE agents would not be deployed to polling places in 2026.

“I am pleased to announce that it was clearly stated by Ms. Honey during the call that ICE will not be placed at any polling location in 2026 and any statement otherwise is disinformation by saying, ‘Any suggestion that ICE will be present at any polling location is simply not true,’” Fontes said in a statement released after the briefing.

Kentucky Secretary of State Michael Adams, a Republican, wrote in a post on X, “DHS confirms to Secretaries of State

that ICE agents will not be at voting locations this year.”

The virtual meeting included officials from the FBI, the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, the Department of Justice (DOJ), the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, and other federal agencies. According to Fontes’s office, the briefing focused on interagency coordination and preparations for the Nov. 3 midterm elections.

State Officials Raise Concerns Over Federal Role

Although such coordination calls are typically routine, this year’s meeting drew heightened scrutiny amid broader political tensions over election administration and federal authority.

Fontes criticized aspects of the call, saying it was “deeply unsettling” that DOJ and DHS officials declined to affirm that under the U.S. Constitution, states run elections. He also objected to Honey’s participation, describing her as an “election denier,” but emphasized that he welcomed her statement regarding ICE’s absence from polling locations.

Honey’s comments came in response to questions from state officials about whether immigration enforcement operations might occur at or near voting sites, according to statements from participants.

A DHS official later clarified that although ICE agents would not be stationed at polling places, law enforcement could respond if “an active public safety threat endangered” a specific location. In such cases, any arrests would be part of a targeted enforcement action related to the threat, rather than a broader immigration sweep.

The Epoch Times reached out to DHS for additional details on the circumstances under which ICE or other DHS personnel might be present at or near voting locations. No response was received by press time.

White House Addresses Speculation

The issue has been politically charged in recent weeks. Steve Bannon, an adviser to President Donald Trump for part of his first term, said on his “War Room” podcast earlier this month that ICE agents should “surround the polls come November,” prompting questions about whether the administration was considering such a move.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said on Feb. 5 that the president had not discussed any “formal plans” to deploy ICE agents at polling locations.

“That’s not something I’ve ever heard the president consider. No,” Leavitt said when asked about Bannon’s remarks.

Pressed on whether she could guar-

antee that ICE would not be present near polling sites, she declined to offer a blanket assurance.

“I can’t guarantee that an ICE agent won’t be around a polling location in November. I mean, that’s frankly a very silly hypothetical question,” she said. “But what I can tell you is I haven’t heard the president discuss any formal plans to put ICE outside of polling locations.”

Trump has repeatedly said that non-citizen voting is a problem in U.S. elections. A review by the Brennan Center

Law enforcement could respond if ‘an active public safety threat endangered’ a specific location, a DHS official said.

for Justice described verified cases of noncitizen voting as “vanishingly rare,” but one academic study described noncitizen participation in the 2008 presidential election as “less than fifteen percent, but significantly greater than zero.”

Federal law prohibits the deployment of armed forces at polling places except in limited circumstances, but ICE agents are civilian law enforcement officers and are not subject to the same statutory restrictions as the military. Other federal and state laws, however, bar voter intimidation and interference at polling sites.

Democratic lawmakers and voting rights groups have warned that any visible presence of federal immigration agents near polling locations—particularly in immigrant communities—could deter lawful voters from casting ballots. The American Civil Liberties Union said in November 2025 that deploying federal immigration agents at or around polling places on Election Day would constitute “illegal voter intimidation.”

Trump administration officials have rejected such concerns, saying federal efforts are focused on protecting election integrity rather than suppressing turnout.

National Intelligence Director Tulsi Gabbard recently wrote to Congress, “Interference in U.S. elections is a threat to our republic and a national security threat.”

She said that the administration is committed to ensuring that neither foreign nor domestic actors undermine the electoral process.

Reuters and The Associated Press contributed to this report.

▶ An early voting polling site for midterm primary elections, in Greenville, N.C., on Feb. 12, 2026.



▲ Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents in Minneapolis on Jan. 12, 2026.

REUTERS/ANN SAPHIR



Recurring Unemployment Claims Decline to 1-Month Low

By Andrew Moran

In a potential signal that the U.S. labor market could be on the cusp of renewed hiring momentum, recurring unemployment claims have posted a sharp decline.

Continuing jobless claims fell by 31,000 to a lower-than-expected 1.83 million from the previous week's 1.86 million, according to new data released by the Department of Labor on Feb. 26.

Recurring claims reflect the number of individuals currently receiving unemployment benefits.

After remaining higher than 1.9 million from May 2025 to November 2025, continuing claims have been trending downward, sliding lower than this level for seven consecutive weeks.

The weekly measurement can serve as a gauge for the challenges jobless

people may have in finding work in today's employment climate. Additionally, it could continue to serve as a proxy for the exhaustion of unemployment benefits, since many states limit eligibility to 26 weeks.

Initial jobless claims—a gauge for the number of Americans filing first-time applications for unemployment benefits—ticked up by 4,000 to 212,000 for the third week of February. The consensus estimate was 215,000.

January's severe winter storm, which blanketed many parts of the country, sparked a spike in jobless claims as many businesses shuttered and employment agencies temporarily closed. Over the past two weeks, initial claims have been stabilizing and are now hovering near the historically low average of 200,000.

The four-week average, which re-

moves week-to-week volatility, was little changed at 220,250.

State of the Labor Market
Next week will see a flurry of fresh labor market indicators.

Payroll processor ADP will publish private sector employment data, while global outplacement firm Challenger, Gray and Christmas will report on planned job cuts.

The main event will be on March 6, when the Bureau of Labor Statistics will release the February nonfarm payrolls report.

Early estimates suggest that the U.S. economy created 70,000 jobs this month and that the unemployment rate held steady at 4.3 percent.

Despite 2024 and 2025 recording substantial downward revisions in job creation, market watchers suggest that the economy could be at the start of a reacceleration due to fiscal and monetary stimulus and greater tariff certainty following the Supreme Court's ruling on tariffs.

"The US economy appears to be emerging from a soft patch, evidenced by soft labor market fundamentals, historically low consumer confidence, weak manufacturing activity, and a depressed housing market," John Belton, portfolio manager at Gabelli Funds, said in a note emailed to The Epoch Times.

"The outlook is now for growth reacceleration."

Economists and policymakers have debated whether the labor market faces a supply challenge or a demand issue.

New data from Indeed indicate that job searches rose last month, while job postings in blue-collar and seasonal sectors declined. However, a broad array of professional fields has registered a modest 5 percent increase in job postings.

"Market leverage in the labor market has shifted to employers, with job openings per unemployed persons now below 1.0, and time-to-hire lengthening as companies can afford to be selective in hiring," Indeed labor economists said in a Feb. 19 note.

Speaking at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston on Feb. 24, Fed board member Christopher Waller expressed caution.

Although the economy added 130,000 jobs in January and the unemployment rate dipped to 4.3 percent, Waller said he is unsure whether this suggests that the labor market has "turned a corner" or will be revised away.

The February jobs report could set the stage for his position at next month's policy meeting.

"If the good labor market news of January is revised away or evaporates in February, it would support my position at the [last Federal Open Market Committee] meeting, that a 25-basis-point reduction in the policy rate was appropriate," Waller said.

Waller dissented at the January meeting, supporting a quarter-point rate cut.

Fed board member Lisa Cook, speaking at a National Association for Business Eco-

Over the past two weeks, initial claims have been stabilizing and are now hovering near the historically low average of 200,000.

nomics event on Feb. 24, examined the effects artificial intelligence may be having on employment.

Cook pointed to AI's impact on specific occupations and to its raising the unemployment rate for recent college graduates. But the overall jobless rate remains low, and layoffs are muted.

"Therefore, we do not yet know the exact evolution of this labor-market transition nor its intensity," Cook said in prepared remarks.

Investors overwhelmingly expect the Fed to keep the benchmark federal funds rate unchanged in the 3.5 percent to 3.75 percent range, according to the CME FedWatch Tool.

Reuters contributed to this report.

K-12 Reading, Math Scores Lagging Behind Pre-COVID-19 Pandemic Levels: Study

By Aaron Gifford

Only one-third of American K-12 schools have returned to pre-COVID-19 pandemic achievement levels in math or reading, an education analysis group said this week.

Those findings came as part of a study released on Feb. 24 by NWEA, previously known as Northwest Evaluation Association, that analyzed scores from more than 5 million students across 9,326 schools. Comparing scores from 2019 and 2024, the organization said only one in seven schools recovered in both math and reading.

NWEA said schools serving high-poverty neighborhoods made the largest gains in scores over the past five years but are still behind pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels. Overall, the report states, schools in rural areas had the highest rates of recovery compared with their suburban and urban counterparts.

"Our findings show there was not a single path to recovery," Emily Morton, NWEA lead research scientist, said in a Feb. 24 statement.

"While some schools recovered by avoiding initial declines, others rebounded with remarkable growth. These 'rebounder

schools' offer critical lessons and investments that can help students regain lost ground and continue moving forward."

NWEA's report does not identify specific school districts, provide score comparisons, or show examples of what certain school districts did to improve academic performance.

NWEA urged schools that are seeing improvements in math and reading scores to publicize their learning recovery efforts and share the knowledge so that more classrooms can get back on track. The organization also implored education leaders to identify schools that are the furthest behind and dedicate more resources to helping them catch up.

The latest "Report Card" released by the National Assessment of Educational Progress in 2025 indicates that most U.S. high school seniors can earn a diploma even if they are not at grade level in reading or math. It also states that 69 percent of eighth graders last year were below proficiency levels in science.

That federal office, which is under the Department of Education, also reported that 69 percent of fourth graders and 70

percent of eighth graders were not proficient in reading. In math, 61 percent of fourth graders and 72 percent of eighth graders were not proficient.

School districts will have a few months to learn from one another what is working and what is not working ahead of the next federal Report Card.

Standardized tests for 600,000 students in every state will take place before March 20. This year's assessments include math and reading for grades four and eight and a U.S. history and civics exam for grade eight.

Starting this year, students will be able to take the tests on school-issued devices instead of devices provided by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, officials from that office announced last month, and the test questions will align "more closely to what students learn in math and reading now."

The reading tests for the first time will also measure comprehension of texts on science and social studies, not just literature.

The 2026 reading and math results will be released in early 2027. The U.S. history and civics results will follow, with a summer 2027 release date expected.

NWEA said schools serving high-poverty neighborhoods made the largest gains in scores over the past five years but are still behind pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels.

ROBYN BECK/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



A teacher and students at a high school in Los Angeles on May 25, 2017.

Tech Bosses to Meet at White House, Pledge Their Data Centers Won't Boost Electricity Bills

By Jacki Thrapp

Leaders in big tech are expected to meet with President Donald Trump at the White House next week to pledge that their data centers will not increase the energy bills of Americans living near the facilities.

"Major tech companies will join President Trump at the White House next week to formally sign the Rate Payer Protection Pledge that he announced during his historic State of the Union address," a White House official told The Epoch Times on Feb. 25.

The March 4 event will include representatives from Amazon, Google, Meta, Microsoft, xAI, Oracle, and OpenAI.

The initiative will require massive

100 MEGAWATTS
Any data center project must have more than '100 megawatts (MW) of new load dedicated to AI inference, training, simulation, or synthetic data generation,' the order states.

companies to build, bring, or buy their own power supply for new artificial intelligence data centers in order to avoid causing Americans' electricity bills to skyrocket.

"President Trump is committed to ensuring American AI dominance while simultaneously lowering costs for working families," the White House official said on Feb. 25.

Trump first revealed the plans during his wide-ranging and record-breaking State of the Union address at the U.S. Capitol on Feb. 24.

"We're telling the major tech companies that they have the obligation to provide for their own power needs," Trump said on the night of Feb. 24. "They can build their own power plants as part of

their factory, so that no one's prices will go up and, in many cases, prices of electricity will go down for the community, and very substantially down."

In July 2025, Trump issued an executive order aimed at streamlining data center projects in America.

"These plans include artificial intelligence (AI) data centers and infrastructure that powers them, including high-voltage transmission lines and other equipment," Trump wrote in the executive order. "It will be a priority of my administration to facilitate the rapid and efficient buildout of this infrastructure by easing federal regulatory burdens."

Any data center project must have more than "100 megawatts (MW) of new load dedicated to AI inference,

training, simulation, or synthetic data generation," the order states.

Surging electricity bills caused by data center development was one of the key issues in the November gubernatorial elections in New Jersey and Virginia.

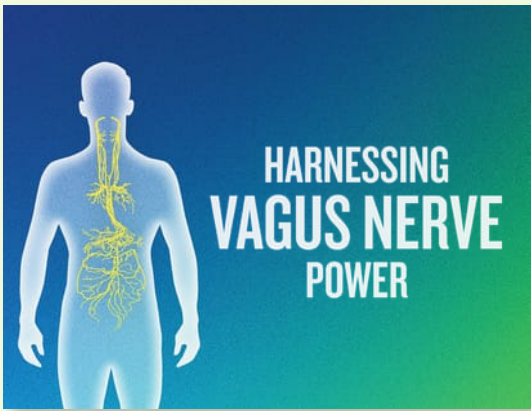
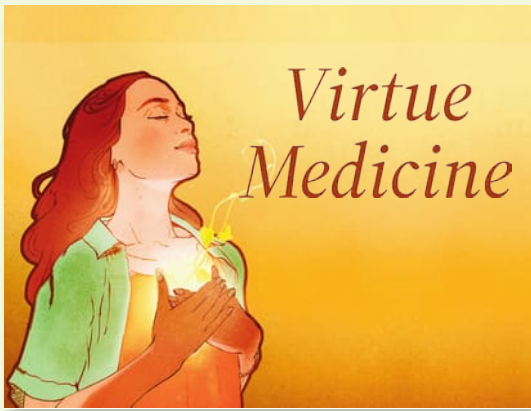
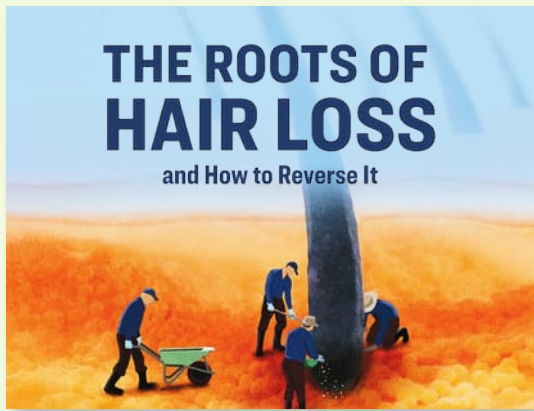
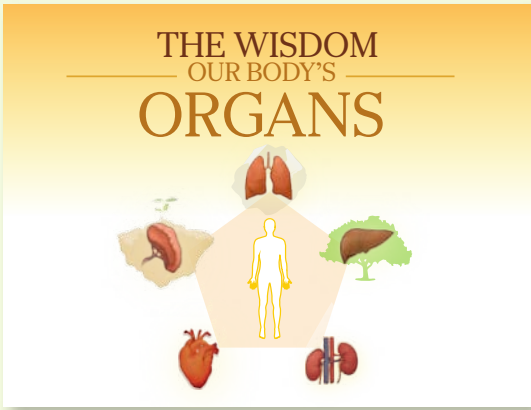
Customers in New Jersey paid an average of 19 percent more for energy in 2025 compared with 2024.

Virginia customers who already experienced 30 percent hikes from 2020 to 2023 will likely see rate increases of up to 21 percent by 2027.

Big tech is planning a series of data center projects, including a 400-megawatt natural gas plant by Meta in New Albany, Ohio, while Energy Northwest and Amazon plan to build a Cascade Advanced Energy Facility near Richland, Washington.

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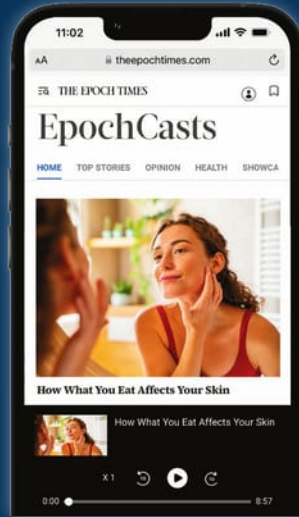
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THE EPOCH TIMES

Vance Tells Wisconsin Voters ‘American Dream’ Is on the Ballot

By Travis Gillmore

Vice President JD Vance spoke to Wisconsin voters at the Pointe Precision machining facility in Plover, Wisconsin, on Feb. 26, telling the crowd that the future of the country is on the line in midterm elections this November.

“Here’s the thing about the American dream: The government cannot give it to you,” Vance said. “But the government, with bad policy and bad leadership, it can destroy the American dream, whatever shape it takes, and the lives of you and your children.”

Voters are faced with a fundamental question on the ballot, according to administration officials.

“This is really a battle of common sense versus crazy,” Small Business Administration Administrator Kelly Loeffler said at the same event.

The vice president emphasized what he described as stark policy differences between the Democratic and Republican agendas.

“Do we give power to the people who fight for corruption, fight for fraud, fight for illegal aliens?” Vance asked. “Or do we give the government to the American citizens for whom it was de-

signed and for whom it was created?”

Vance and Dr. Mehmet Oz, administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, held a news conference on Feb. 25 announcing new approaches to combating fraud nationwide, while withholding from the state of Minnesota \$259 million in federal Medicaid reimbursement payments because of widespread reported fraud.

“We have way too many people that got too comfortable getting rich off of your tax dollars instead of providing the services that they need,” Vance told the Wisconsin crowd. “We have fraudsters getting rich off of your generosity.”

Officials are investigating the illegitimate use of federal monies nationwide.

“Some of the worst corruption is the corruption you see in the federal government,” Vance said. “Why don’t we stop allowing congressmen and congresswomen to get rich off of insider trading?”

He discussed the accomplishments listed by President Donald Trump during his State of the Union speech on Feb. 24, while also noting the decision of many Democratic Party congressional representatives to remain seated during moments of celebration.



“What kind of person can’t stand up and cheer for an innocent young girl that’s doing well and showing the entire country strength and resilience?” Vance said.

Vance made the remarks to an audience of supporters and 165 employees of the machining company—which specializes in “mission critical” materials for the aerospace and medical industries, among others—in the contested Third Congressional District in the central part of the Badger State.

“Wisconsin is a state of great tradition of building great American prod-

ucts with Wisconsin hands, and that’s what we’re here to celebrate today in this great facility,” Vance said.

“This is the place that rewards dignified work, and a place that makes America and the whole community richer, so you should be proud of yourselves.”

He strongly endorsed Rep. Derrick Van Orden (R-Wis.), who is running for reelection in the district.

Trump and Vance are on tours of states nationwide, touting their economic and national security agendas, with the president scheduled to appear in Corpus Christi, Texas, on Feb. 27.

▲ Vice President JD Vance waves after speaking at Pointe Precision in Plover, Wis., on Feb. 26, 2026.

Hillary Clinton Says She Knew Nothing About Jeffrey Epstein’s Crimes

By Zachary Stieber

Hillary Clinton told members of Congress on Feb. 26 that she does not have knowledge about crimes carried out by sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, now deceased, and his one-time girlfriend Ghislaine Maxwell.

“I had no idea about their criminal activities. I do not recall ever encountering Mr. Epstein. I never flew on his plane or visited his island, homes, or offices,” the former first lady and secretary of state said in her opening statement to the House Oversight Committee.

Clinton said she was horrified to learn about the crimes and was disappointed that Epstein received only 13 months in prison in 2008 after pleading guilty to soliciting a minor for prostitution.

Clinton’s husband, former President Bill Clinton, was also slated to testify to the panel in its investigation into Epstein. The Clintons agreed to testify after the House of Representatives was prepared to hold them in contempt for originally declining to answer questions on the matter.

Epstein died by suicide in federal prison in 2019 while awaiting trial on sex trafficking charges. Maxwell was



▲ Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Munich on Feb. 14, 2026.

sentenced to 20 years in prison in 2022 for conspiring with Epstein to sexually abuse young girls.

Bill Clinton flew on Epstein’s plane in 2002 and 2003, according to flight logs and photographs. Court documents stated that he went to Epstein’s island, where authorities say Epstein repeatedly abused minors.

Maxwell told Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche in 2025 that she was friends with Bill Clinton and that the former president never went to the island.

“He never, absolutely never, went,” she said. “And I can be sure of that because there’s no way he would have gone. I

don’t believe there’s any way that he would’ve gone to the island had I not been there. Because I don’t believe he had an independent friendship, if you will, with Epstein.”

Epstein also went to the White House multiple times while Bill Clinton was president. Maxwell also attended the wedding of the Clintons’ only daughter in 2010.

Bill Clinton’s spokesperson told New York Magazine in 2002, “Jeffrey is both a highly successful financier and a committed philanthropist with a keen sense of global markets and an in-depth knowledge of twenty-first-century science.”

A spokesperson for Bill Clinton said after Epstein was arrested by federal authorities that the former president “knows nothing about the terrible crimes Jeffrey Epstein pleaded guilty to in Florida some years ago, or those with which he has been recently charged in New York.”

The spokesperson said that the trips on Epstein’s plane included stops for Clinton Foundation work and that Bill Clinton briefly visited Epstein’s home in New York and met with Epstein in a Clinton office in the city.

“He’s not spoken to Epstein in well

over a decade and has never been to Little St. James Island, Epstein’s ranch in New Mexico, or his residence in Florida,” the spokesperson said.

A letter from lawmakers to the Clintons said they wanted to question them, given their family’s past relationships with Epstein and Maxwell.

Lawmakers also wrote, addressing Hillary Clinton, “Given your past service as Secretary of State, the Committee believes that you may have knowledge of efforts by the federal government to combat international sex trafficking operations of the type run by Mr. Epstein.”

“The American people have a lot of questions,” Rep. James Comer (R-Ky.), chairman of the House Oversight Committee, told reporters in Washington as lawmakers prepared to question the Clintons. “To my knowledge, the Clintons haven’t answered very many, if any, questions about their knowledge or involvement with Epstein and Maxwell.”

Comer said that no one is accusing the Clintons at this time of wrongdoing but that the committee is trying to find answers regarding Epstein, including how he accumulated so much wealth and whether he worked for the government.

Google Disrupts China-Tied Cyber Campaign That Hacked 42 Countries

By Catherine Yang

Google Threat Intelligence Group (GTIG) said on Feb. 25 that Google and its cybersecurity partners disrupted a global espionage campaign that the group confirmed had hacked 42 countries and suspects infected at least 20 more.

GTIG has tracked the group as UNC2814/Gallium since 2017 and suspects it to be Chinese.

“This prolific, elusive actor has a long history of targeting international governments and global telecommunications organizations across Africa, Asia, and the Americas,” the report reads.

The campaign is characterized by stealth tactics and the targeting of cloud-hosted products to disguise its traffic. The group stated that this campaign is distinct and separate from Salt Typhoon, a major Chinese regime-backed cyberespionage campaign.

“This was a vast surveillance apparatus used to spy on people and organizations throughout the world,” GTIG Chief Analyst John Hultquist said.

GTIG said its disruption efforts have terminated the group’s access to a backdoor, disabled its infrastructure, and

revoked its accounts and access to relevant Google products.

The campaign came on the heels of the discovery of a novel backdoor the group used that Google tracks as Gridtide, “a sophisticated C-based backdoor with the ability to execute arbitrary shell commands, upload files, and download files.”

Charley Snyder, GTIG senior manager, said the backdoor was installed on a system that had access to phone numbers, dates and places of birth, voter IDs, and national ID numbers.

The group’s recent activity has targeted telecommunication providers and government organizations, according to the report.

“This prolific scope is likely the result of a decade of concentrated effort,” the report reads.

Google recently warned that foreign adversaries are targeting the U.S. defense industrial base in cyberspace. In a Feb. 10 report, it said that groups in Russia, North Korea, and primarily China have carried out sustained cyberattacks in recent months, the most active ever observed and posing “significant risk to the defense and aerospace sector.”

In both reports, Google found that



▲ John Hultquist, then-director of intelligence analysis at FireEye, at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington on Jan. 7, 2020.

edge devices were being exploited, highlighting the trend of malicious cyberactors targeting hardware such as routers, controllers, sensors, and smart devices that don’t have the same level of security as devices at the center of a network.

There are many times more edge devices than people on the planet, providing hackers with endless targeting options, and the majority of enterprise data is generated or processed on these devices.

“In modern warfare, the front lines are no longer confined to the battle-

field; they extend directly into the servers and supply chains of the industry that safeguards the nation,” the GTIG’s Feb. 10 report reads, noting compromises up and down the supply chain and hiring processes.

Cybersecurity agencies around the world have increasingly sounded the alarm on Chinese state-backed cyberespionage, and in 2025, a joint advisory cosigned by more than a dozen nations was published with the aim of exposing the Salt Typhoon campaign.

Reuters contributed to this report.



Behind America’s New Industrial Revolution

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More than 70 percent of companies recorded positive earnings surprises in the fourth quarter of 2025, according to FactSet data.

On Feb. 6, the Dow Jones Industrial Average surpassed 50,000 for the first time—after the S&P hit 7,000 on Jan. 28.

During his State of the Union address on Feb. 24, Trump credited these milestones to his economic policies, particularly tariffs.

In a Truth Social post on Feb. 6, Trump also made a bold prediction: “I am predicting 100,000 on the Dow by the end of my term. Remember, Trump was right about everything!”

Strong corporate earnings, technological innovation, and a positive economic outlook all have contributed to the U.S. stock market’s appeal.

Despite the recent market volatility, entrepreneur and investor Kevin O’Leary believes the United States remains the “most trusted” investment hub for global investors.

“You’ve got to realize, 52 cents of every dollar created on earth is invested in the American stock market,” O’Leary told The Epoch Times on Jan. 28 during a summit about “Trump Accounts” for newborns.

“It’s the most liquid and most successful economy on earth,” the “Shark Tank” star said. “It provides consistent returns.”

On Independence Day last year, Trump signed the One Big Beautiful Bill Act into law, which included pro-business measures aimed at boosting capital spending and encouraging the onshoring of factories.

Among its provisions was the permanent restoration of 100 percent bonus depreciation for qualified assets. The policy allows businesses to immediately deduct the full cost of new factories, factory improvements, capital investments such as machinery and equipment, and software, as well as domestic research and development. Many companies are

Wind turbine components at CS Wind’s plant in Pueblo, Colo., on Nov. 29, 2023.



ANDREW CABALLERO-REYNOLDS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



MICHAEL M. SANTIAGO/GETTY IMAGES

▲ Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange during morning trading in New York City on Feb. 24, 2026.

leveraging bonus depreciation to reduce tax liability and reinvest in growth.

The manufacturing footprint is expanding, and the AI boom is increasing demand for energy, data centers, and commodities. Despite concerns about an AI bubble, U.S. technology giants Alphabet, Amazon, Meta, and Microsoft plan to invest collectively about \$650 billion in 2026, mainly to expand their AI infrastructure.

These trends are driving renewed investor optimism, according to Panayotov.

Growing Productivity Gap

Recent data show U.S. businesses are also becoming more efficient, with nonfarm productivity jumping by 4.9 percent in the third quarter of last year. Productivity measures how efficiently companies produce goods and services using given input such as labor and capital.

While U.S. productivity has increased rapidly since 2019, productivity growth in the UK and eurozone has remained mostly stagnant, according to data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. The growing productivity gap between the United States and Europe is largely explained by the tech sector.

Economists note that most innovation over the past few decades has occurred in the United States, while Europe has lagged behind, primarily because of excessive regulation.

“The EU is weak in the emerging technologies that will drive future growth,” a 2024 report by the European Commission stated. “Only four of the world’s top 50 tech companies are European.”

The outlook also appears favorable for the United States. A recent Financial Times survey found that more than three-quarters of economists expect the United States to keep or increase its productivity lead over other countries. They point to AI, strong capital markets, and lower energy costs as the main reasons.

“Productivity growth is good for everyone and keeps inflation at bay,” Nancy Tengler, CEO of Laffer Tengler Investments, said in a recent note to clients.

Cutting Red Tape

Reducing regulatory barriers is central to Trump’s economic agenda. It aims to lower business compliance costs, allowing companies to reinvest capital, increase productivity, and create more jobs.

According to economist Daniel Lacalle, a contributor to The Epoch Times, deregulation has been a key driver of the U.S. economy’s strong performance in recent quarters relative to other advanced economies.

In his view, deregulation alongside lower taxes has delivered an “immediate boost to production, economic growth, and private investment.”

U.S. manufacturing activity expanded in January for the first time in 12 months. Typically, developed countries experience growth in services while manufacturing remains stagnant, Lacalle told The Epoch Times.

The United States is the only major economy implementing reforms, such as deregulation, tax cuts, and tariffs, to encourage manufacturing and investment, he said.

Since returning to office, Trump has rolled back regulations across sectors including finance, energy, and technology.

In December 2025, the White House Office of Management and Budget announced that federal agencies eliminated 646 regulations while introducing only five new ones in fiscal year 2025. That amounts to 129 regulations removed for every new one issued, far exceeding the 10-to-one goal set by the president. The White House estimates that these efforts have generated \$212 billion in savings, or

more than \$600 per American.

“Deregulation is unleashing innovation in every sector,” Cathie Wood, founder and CEO of Ark Invest, said in her 2026 Outlook report.

More recently, Trump announced the repeal of an Obama-era rule that imposed greenhouse gas emissions restrictions on U.S. industries. The White House described the move as “the largest deregulatory action in American history,” estimating that it will save the American people \$1.3 trillion.

The change is expected to benefit the fossil fuel and automotive sectors as well as energy-intensive manufacturers and power plants.

Regulations function like a “hidden tax” on consumers and businesses, John Berlau, a senior fellow at the Competitive Enterprise Institute, told The Epoch Times.

He noted that, in addition to the direct costs of complying with regulations, companies also face significant indirect expenses, including hiring staff and outside advisers to navigate these complex requirements.

According to a Competitive Enterprise Institute report, federal regulations cost \$2.2 trillion in 2024, or about \$16,016 per U.S. household each year.

Berlau also argued that regulations can be “insidious” because agencies are often granted broad authority to interpret and implement the rule.

He emphasized that a predictable regulatory environment is essential for businesses to invest and expand.

Tengler said she believes that deregulation is also reshaping the banking sector. She said she expects banks to increase lending rather than park funds in Treasury bills—potentially unlocking more capital for business investment and growth.



▲ A data center under construction in Ashburn, Va.

ANDREW CABALLERO-REYNOLDS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Mortgage Rates Drop Below 6 Percent for First Time in More Than 3 Years

Continued from A1

than last week’s milestone,” Sam Khater, Freddie Mac’s chief economist, said in a statement. “This rate, combined with the improving availability of homes for sale, is meaningful and will drive more potential buyers into the market for spring homebuying season.”

At Realtor.com, economist Jiayi Xu said, “While today’s borrowing costs remain high as 70 percent of mortgage holders have rates below 5 percent, it is far more encouraging than the high 6 percent or 7 percent ranges seen over the previous two spring seasons.”

Lowering rates seem to have been already boosting purchasing power. An analysis by Zillow found that the median-income U.S. household can now afford a \$331,483 home—about \$30,302 more than a year ago—and that roughly 82,300 additional listings have moved within reach compared with 2025. The

real estate company said buying power is at its highest level since March 2022, before mortgage rates rose sharply.

“A more than \$30,000 gain in buying power is meaningful for households that have been stretched thin by high rates,” said Kara Ng, a senior economist at Zillow, in a statement. “That doesn’t suddenly make this market affordable for everyone, but it does crack open doors that had firmly shut when rates peaked.”

The real estate company said buying power is at its highest level since March 2022, before mortgage rates rose sharply.

Still, the affordability improvements may not necessarily feel significant for those looking for a home, as home prices remain near record highs after rising sharply since 2020.

According to the National Association of Realtors, the median price of an existing home was \$396,800 in January, up 0.9 percent from a year earlier. It was the 31st consecutive month of year-over-year price gains.



MADALINA KILROY/THE EPOCH TIMES

▲ A house for sale in Elkridge, Md.

Those price increases have boosted household wealth for existing homeowners, while renters have not seen comparable gains. President Donald Trump has said he wants to make buying a home easier by lowering interest rates, but he has also argued against price declines that would reduce homeowners’ equity.

“I can turn on housing immediately, but you make it too easy and you’re going to knock the value down of

people that own houses,” Trump said at a Cabinet meeting in January. “For those people—those millions of people that own houses—we’re going to drive those values up, but we’re also going to try making it easier for people to buy.”

“People that own their homes, we’re going to keep them wealthy. We’re going to keep those prices up. We’re not going to destroy the value of their homes so that somebody that didn’t work very hard can buy a home.”

ROMAN PILIPEY / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



▲ Ukrainian emergency workers at the site of a missile attack in Sumy, Ukraine, on April 14, 2025.

US, Ukraine Discuss Post-War Reconstruction in Geneva

By Guy Birchall

Officials from Washington and Kyiv met in Geneva on Feb. 26 to discuss post-war reconstruction in Ukraine.

Ukraine and Russia have been at war with each other for four years.

U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff and President Donald Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner were representing the United States in the negotiations, which began shortly after midday, according to Rustem Umerov, chief of the Ukrainian National Security and Defence Council and head of Kyiv’s delegation.

“Together with the Government’s economic team, we will thoroughly work through the prosperity package: mechanisms for economic support and recovery of Ukraine, instruments for attracting investment, and frameworks for long-term cooperation,” Umerov wrote in a Feb. 26 post on X.

He said that “preparations for the next round of trilateral negotiations involving the Russian side” would also be discussed and that “it is necessary to synchroize positions ahead of this stage.”

“An important issue is the humanitarian track and the issue of possible

exchanges. We expect concrete results regarding the return of our citizens,” Umerov said, adding that Ukraine is “focused on practical solutions.”

Ukrainian and U.S. officials last met in Geneva on Feb. 17–18 for trilateral talks that also involved representatives from Russia.

The reconstruction of Ukraine has gained prominence as a factor following the increase in Russian aerial strikes, which have hit Ukrainian infrastructure in recent weeks and months.

Kyiv hopes to attract about \$800 billion of public and private funds over the next decade to rebuild the country, the Ukrainian Ministry of Economy, Environment, and Agriculture said on Jan. 3.

“It is important that the Plan offers a single strategic vision and coordinated approach, rather than separate initiatives. It focuses not only on rebuilding what was destroyed, but also on economic transformation and modernization so that Ukraine has a strong competitive economy, social stability, and high defense capabilities—thereby strengthening European and global security,” Ukrainian Minister of Economy, Environment, and Agriculture Oleksiy So-

bolev said when he announced the plan.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in a Feb. 26 post on X that Russia had launched 420 drones and 39 missiles in another night of attacks on energy and other infrastructure.

“Destruction has been recorded in eight regions, with many private homes and apartment buildings damaged,” he said. “As of now, dozens of people are reported injured as a result of this attack, including children.”

Zelenskyy said that most of the missiles fired by Russia had been downed by Ukraine’s air defenses but that some had gotten through and struck their targets.

The country’s energy infrastructure has been particularly battered by Moscow’s barrage over the winter, according to Kyiv. Ukrainian Energy Minister Denys Shmyhal said on Jan. 16 that “there is not a single power plant left in Ukraine that has not been hit by the enemy during the war.”

Moscow has denied intentionally attacking civilian targets and said the overnight assault Zelenskyy referred to was in response to Kyiv’s attacks on Russian civilian facilities.

According to state news agency TASS, Russia’s Ministry of Defense stated: “Last night, in response to the Kiev regime’s terrorist attacks on civilian infrastructure facilities on Russian territory, the Russian Armed Forces delivered a massive strike by ground-based and airborne unmanned aerial vehicles on Ukraine’s military-industrial enterprises and energy infrastructure facilities used to support the Ukrainian army’s operations, and also military airfields.”

The latest World Bank assessment, released on Feb. 23, estimated that rebuilding Ukraine’s economy will cost \$588 billion. The assessment is based on data from Feb. 24, 2022, through Dec. 31, 2025.

That figure amounts to more than three times the country’s projected gross national product for 2025, according to Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko.

On Feb. 25, in a Telegram post, Zelenskyy said he had spoken with Trump.

During that call, the presidents agreed that the next round of trilateral talks with Russia, slated for March, should lead to a meeting of the countries’ leaders to tackle the most difficult issues preventing peace.

“Only in this way can all the complex and sensitive issues be resolved and the war finally ended,” Zelenskyy said.

Witkoff and Kushner were also involved in the call.

While in Geneva, the pair will also be conducting negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program.

Third Round of US-Iran Talks End Without Breakthrough

By Ryan Morgan

U.S. and Iranian delegations concluded a third round of indirect talks in Geneva on Feb. 26, without a diplomatic breakthrough to avoid potential armed conflict in the Middle East.

The U.S. military has been ramping up its force footprint in the Middle East since January, as U.S. President Donald Trump has pursued a new deal to halt Iran’s nuclear programs. Talks in Geneva came the same week the Trump administration raised allegations that Iran is trying to rebuild its nuclear program and pursue a warhead after the June 2025 U.S. strikes on three of its nuclear sites.

Despite not reaching a deal on Feb. 26, mediator and Omani Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi signaled some progress and indicated that the parties are prepared to continue talks.

“We have finished the day after significant progress in the negotiation between the United States and Iran,” Albusaidi said in an X post. “We will resume soon after consultation in the respective capitals.”

Albusaidi said the parties would meet next week in Vienna for a round of technical discussions.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who has represented Tehran in discussions, also signaled progress following the Feb. 26 talks. Araghchi said he welcomed the presence of Rafael Grossi, director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

“Today was one of the most serious

and longest rounds of negotiations,” Araghchi said.

The Iranian representative signaled Tehran’s readiness to enter another round of talks next week.

The White House did not respond to a request for comment about the Geneva talks by press time.

U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner represented Washington at the negotiations, just as they had in Geneva last week and in Muscat, Oman, on Feb. 6.

In an interview with Fox News on Feb. 22, Witkoff said Iran continues to retain stocks of uranium enriched to 60 percent purity. Weapons-grade nuclear material needs a purity of about 90 percent.

During the interview, Witkoff said Iran is “probably a week away from having industrial-grade bomb-making material.”

Speaking with reporters during a visit to the Caribbean island nation of Saint Kitts and Nevis, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio also alleged that Iran has taken steps to repair its

nuclear program after the U.S. strikes.

“They were told not to try to restart it, and here they are,” Rubio said. “You can see them always trying to rebuild elements of it.

“They’re not enriching right now, but they’re trying to get to the point where they ultimately can.”

Rubio also reiterated concerns about Iran’s conventional weapons, including ballistic missiles that can strike U.S. bases in the Middle East.

“Beyond just the nuclear program, they possess these conventional weapons that are solely designed to attack America and attack Americans,” Rubio said.

This week, Araghchi reiterated the long-standing Iranian assurance not to pursue nuclear weapons but said his country would not forgo peaceful nuclear energy. Araghchi has also said Iran’s missile programs would not be up for discussion.

Jacob Burg contributed to this report.

FABRICE COFFRINI / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



▲ U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff arrives at his hotel during a new round of talks between the United States and Iran in Geneva on Feb. 26, 2026.

US Treasury to Allow Resale of Venezuelan Oil to Cuba to Ease Island’s Fuel Crunch

By Kimberly Hayek

The U.S. Treasury Department on Feb. 25 announced a new licensing policy to streamline the resale of Venezuelan oil to Cuba, with the goal of supporting the island’s private sector and bolstering humanitarian efforts amid ongoing fuel crises.

The Office of Foreign Assets Control will extend the new licensing policy to specific applications seeking authorization for the resale of Venezuelan oil for use in Cuba.

The move was done “in accordance with the United States’ support and solidarity for the Cuban people,” the new policy reads.

The policy does not cover entities or persons connected to the Cuban military, intelligence services, or other government institutions, including entities on the U.S. State Department’s Cuba Restricted List.

The reason why things are as bad as they are is because [Cuba has] an economic model that doesn’t work, doesn’t exist anywhere in the world.

Secretary of State
Marco Rubio

The Treasury’s Cuban Assets Control Regulations generally already authorize U.S. persons to export oil from the United States to Cuba, or to reexport U.S.-origin oil from a third country to Cuba, where that export or reexport has been authorized by the Commerce Department.

The United States has in recent months placed increased pressure on Cuba’s energy procurement network, especially in the wake of former Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro’s capture in January. Oil shipments to Cuba have plummeted, worsening shortages that have disrupted everyday life.

Canadian officials earlier this month advised citizens to prepare for unpredictable conditions in Cuba due to fuel scarcity. U.S. federal advisories warned against nonessential travel, with oil shortages a key issue.

In January, President Donald Trump imposed tariffs via executive order on any nation selling oil to Cuba.

“I find that the policies, practices, and actions of the Government of Cuba constitute an unusual and extraordinary threat, which has its source in whole or substantial part outside the United States, to the national security and foreign policy of the United States,” the executive order reads.

The United States recently eased certain sanctions, permitting established American firms to trade Venezuelan crude under strict conditions, but it prohibits deals with adversaries such as Russia, Iran, North Korea, Cuba, and China.

In an unrelated press briefing on Feb. 25, Secretary of State Marco Rubio echoed Trump’s push for reform in Cuba.

“The reason why things are as bad as they are is because they have an economic model that doesn’t work, doesn’t exist anywhere in the world,” Rubio said. “It is not functional. And the only way Cuba is going to have a better future is if it has a different economic model.”

China’s High-Level CCP Meeting Signals Tighter Political Standards for Officials: Analysts

By Michael Zhuang

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has convened a meeting of its Central Leading Group for Party Building in Beijing to advance what the regime calls the “correct view of political performance,” according to the CCP’s official mouthpiece.

The Feb. 24 meeting, chaired by Politburo Standing Committee member Cai Qi and attended by the Party’s anti-corruption chief, Li Xi, emphasized the need to “integrate study, inspection, and rectification” and to establish mechanisms to ensure consistent “political performance,” the People’s Daily reported.

At first glance, the meeting appeared routine—another internal session focused on Party discipline. But insiders and analysts say the presence of high-level officials was unusual and suggests broader political significance.

Two members of the Politburo Standing Committee appearing together at a Party-building meeting is uncommon, analysts told The Epoch Times. Although the official framing centered on governance standards, analysts said the underlying message was political. Moreover, the meeting took place a month after the purges of Zhang Youxia and Liu Zhenli, two of the People’s Liberation Army’s most senior members.

The insiders and analysts spoke to The Epoch Times on condition of anonymity due to fears of reprisal.

The Underlying Political Signal

An insider from within the CCP told The Epoch Times that the meeting focused less on administrative skills and more on aligning with Chinese leader Xi Jinping.

“Strictly speaking, this is a political warning to senior officials from Cai Qi,” the insider said.

“The so-called study means strengthening political identification and com-



▲ Delegates attend the opening session of the National People's Congress in Beijing on March 5, 2025.

pliance with Xi’s command. ‘Inspection’ means investigating violations of Party discipline. And ‘rectification’ is about targeting what they call ‘outstanding problems’—in reality, dissenting voices at high levels.”

The official communiqué also stated that the new standards would be embedded in upcoming leadership reshuffles at the provincial, municipal, county, and township levels—effectively linking promotion prospects to political loyalty.

That detail stood out to the insider.

“When the top leadership raises the issue of ‘political performance,’ it ultimately comes down to where you stand [politically],” the insider said. “By deploying this tactic through the Party-building apparatus, they are re-drawing internal lines—determining who is on the core track and who is on the margins.”

Repetitive references in the state media report to “strengthening coordination” and “consolidating Party committee responsibility” were highly politicized, the insider said, signaling a

push for ideological uniformity rather than policy reform.

High-Level Attendance Raises Eyebrows

The composition of the meeting itself was unusual.

In addition to Cai and Li Xi, state media reported that senior officials present included Shi Taifeng, Li Shulei, and Mu Hong—all figures holding positions at or near the apex of the CCP’s political hierarchy.

Under the CCP’s political ranking system, officials at the “vice-national” level—such as Mu, vice chair of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference—are considered national leaders, subordinate only to Xi and the Politburo Standing Committee, China’s top decision-making body. Such a concentration of senior officials at a routine Party-building meeting is rare.

Chen, a Chinese political science scholar based in Europe, told The Epoch Times that the joint appearance of Cai, who oversees Party-building and

political ideology, and Li Xi, head of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, carries particular weight.

“Li Xi’s presence itself is a warning,” Chen said. “If your [political] direction is deemed incorrect, it can quickly become a disciplinary issue. Performance problems can be elevated into political problems.”

In the CCP’s system, discipline investigations often precede the downfall of senior officials.

Power Consolidation or Power Anxiety?

The meeting comes at a time of mounting economic strain in China.

Local government finances have deteriorated sharply in recent years, with growing hidden debt burdens. Meanwhile, foreign companies are increasingly leaving the country.

Against that backdrop, the CCP has chosen to emphasize ideological alignment within the Party rather than publicly highlighting economic reform.

That priority has prompted debate among analysts.

“In a system where power is already highly centralized under Xi Jinping, frequent internal rectification campaigns can signal not strength but unease,” Chen said. “If power were completely secure, there would be less need to repeatedly recalibrate the cadre corps.”

Chen noted that a heavy emphasis on political direction suggests sensitivity to internal cohesion. “Repeatedly demanding loyalty implies that loyalty cannot simply be assumed,” the scholar said.

While officially framed as an effort to ensure officials’ political performance, the Feb. 24 meeting has been widely interpreted by analysts as part of a broader effort to reinforce political discipline ahead of upcoming leadership reshuffles during the top annual “Two Sessions” meetings scheduled for early March.

Wang Xin contributed to this report.

China Removes 9 Senior Officers as Military Purges Escalate

Continued from A1

has increasingly delayed disclosing purges of its senior military officers.

Among the senior commanders who were ousted on Feb. 26 were Qin Shengxiang, former political commissar of the navy; Yu Zhongfu, former political commissar of the air force; Shen Jinlong, former commander of the navy; and Li Wei, former political commissar of the information support force.

The other PLA officers expelled by Beijing include Ding Laifu of the ground force, Yang Guang of the rocket force, Bian Ruifeng of the Central Military Commission, and former political commissar of the National Defense Mobilization Commission Wang Donghai.

The announcement comes less than a week before the NPC’s annual session—China’s biggest political gathering—scheduled to begin on March 5. Over the following two weeks, about 2,800 delegates are set to rubber-stamp a slate of budgets, legislation, and personnel changes that have already been approved by the ruling CCP.

Analysts are now closely monitoring any signs of personnel changes during the upcoming session, particularly concerning the fates of the country’s most senior military chiefs, Zhang Youxia and Liu Zhenli.

Beijing has offered few details about

the reasons for their sudden downfall since the brief announcement on Jan. 24 that the two generals had been placed under investigation for “serious violations of discipline and law.” Should they be removed from the legislature during this session, they would lose immunity from criminal prosecution.

Ahead of the latest round of dismissals, 27 military officers had already lost their NPC titles since March 2023, the highest number in any delegation, according to a Feb. 23 report by the Asia Society Policy Institute’s Center for China Analysis.

The ongoing purges of the PLA’s top brass have already raised questions about the military’s modernization efforts, a transformation the regime has invested billions of dollars in achieving by 2027.

In an annual survey published on Feb. 24, the International Institute for Strategic Studies said ongoing purges have left the PLA with “serious deficiencies” in its command structure.

More than 100 senior PLA officers—who hold the rank of general or lieutenant general—have likely been purged since 2022, according to a tally by the China Power Project of the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

“And it’s not clear that [Chinese leader] Xi Jinping is done with his purges,” Bonny Lin, director of the China Power Project, said at a Feb. 24 webinar. “These purges have touched every part of the PLA.”



▲ Delegates from the Chinese military arrive at the closing session of the National People's Congress in Beijing on March 11, 2025.



▲ Pedestrians on an overpass above traffic in Beijing on Feb. 11, 2026.

Truck Catches Fire in Tunnel on Beijing-Kunming Expressway, Causing Panic

By Alex Wu

A fire accompanied by loud bangs broke out in the Gujiashan Tunnel on the G5 Beijing-Kunming Expressway, causing panic on Feb. 23, the seventh day of the Chinese New Year holiday, which this year is celebrated from Feb. 17 to March 3.

The Sichuan provincial police stated on social media that a freight truck carrying fruit suddenly caught fire at approximately 10:50 a.m. inside the Gujiashan Tunnel in the outbound direction at mile 921 of the G5 Beijing-Kunming Expressway.

Police said the fire had been extinguished, there were no injuries, and no one was stranded at the scene. Traffic in the inbound lane resumed normal operation at 2:50 p.m., and the cause of the fire is under further investigation.

A witness, Yang Ling, who requested to use a pseudonym out of fear of reprisal, told The Epoch Times that her family of four was on a road trip from Henan Province to Chengdu when the incident occurred on their way home.

“A large truck loaded with oranges caught fire inside the tunnel,” she said. “We were trapped inside the tunnel, which is more than 1.24 miles long. Everyone abandoned their vehicles and ran out of the tunnel, including pregnant women, the elderly, and children. Some people didn’t even have time to

put on their shoes before running out.”

Yang said that when she was running, “it felt like the end of the world.”

“When I got out of the tunnel, it was already filled with thick smoke,” she said. “I didn’t know if it would explode. I thought the car was doomed.”

“I thought I was going to die,” she said. “I even prepared my last words, but I couldn’t make a call because there was no signal. It was really lucky that only the truck burned. The other vehicles did not catch fire, and there were no casualties. We were very fortunate.”

Liu, who also asked to use a pseudonym out of fear of reprisal, told mainland Chinese media that he was a few vehicles behind the burning truck. He said that he heard three loud bangs and that the tunnel and his vehicle were shaking.

Unsure of the situation and fearing an explosion, he said he immediately got out of his vehicle and fled. He noticed that the tunnel was congested, and many rear-end collisions occurred while cars were reversing; his car was also involved in one.

Videos circulating online show the tunnel packed with cars and many people abandoning their vehicles and fleeing toward the exit, asking each other what had happened.

Tang Bing and Gu Xiaohua contributed to this report.

Hong Kong Court Overturns Jimmy Lai’s Fraud Conviction

By Frank Fang

A Hong Kong appeals court has overturned fraud convictions against Jimmy Lai, handing the former media mogul a rare legal victory even as he faces 20 years in prison on a separate national security charge that could keep him incarcerated for life.

Lai, 78, an outspoken critic of China’s communist regime and founder of the now-defunct newspaper Apple Daily, has been widely seen as a symbol of Hong Kong’s diminishing press freedom and civil liberties. He has now spent more than 1,800 days in prison since his 2020 arrest.

A lower court judge in December 2022 sentenced Lai to five years and nine months in prison and fined him HK\$2 million (about \$257,000 at the time), saying that the defendant had breached a lease contract for his newspaper’s headquarters by concealing the operations of a private company, Dico Consultants, in the building. Lai’s co-defendant, Wong Wai-keung, was sentenced to 21 months in prison.

On Feb. 26, Hong Kong Judges Jeremy Poon, Anthea Pang, and Derek Pang stated in the judgment that they allowed the appeal from Lai and Wong to proceed, as the lower court judge had “erred.”

“In conclusion, we hold that Apple Daily Printing did not owe a duty to the Corporation to disclose its breach of the user restrictions or the non-alienation clauses occasioned by Dico’s occupation and use of the said Premises,” the judgment reads. “With respect, the Judge erred.

“His reasoning in concluding that the applicants were liable for the concealment as the prosecution contended is unsupportable. He erred in making those findings.”

The judges said the prosecution had “failed to prove beyond reasonable doubt” that Lai had “made false representation,” according to the judgment.



▲ People protest the unjust conviction of media entrepreneur Jimmy Lai, at the Chinese Consulate General, in Los Angeles on Feb. 14, 2026.

“The Court of Appeal gave them leave to appeal against their conviction, allowed their appeals, quashed the convictions and set aside the sentences,” the judges wrote in a news summary of their judgment.

The judges said the prosecution had ‘failed to prove beyond reasonable doubt’ that Lai had ‘made false representation.’

Even with his fraud conviction and sentence overturned, Lai could still stay behind bars until 2042 if he serves the full 20-year sentence handed down earlier this month, according to Washington-based advocacy group Hong Kong Democracy Council.

Lai was sentenced to 20 years in prison over two counts of “conspiracy to collude with foreign forces” under the Beijing-imposed national security law and one count of “sedition” under a colonial-era sedition law.

In a statement responding to the lat-

est court ruling, a spokesperson for the Hong Kong government said the city’s Department of Justice will study the judgment “thoroughly” before deciding whether to appeal.

“Although the Court of Appeal considered that, in the factual context of this case, the breach in question did not reach the criminal conviction threshold for the offence of ‘fraud,’ the objective fact remains that [Jimmy] Lai Chee-ying has exploited public resources for private use,” the spokesperson wrote.

Sebastien Lai, Jimmy Lai’s son, said the ruling did not change anything for his father.

“He still has a sentence of 20 years in prison and has spent the last half a decade in solitary confinement in maximum security,” the younger Lai told Reuters. “The right thing is to release him immediately before it is too late.”

Jimmy Lai’s daughter, Claire Lai, and Sebastien Lai have warned that their father could die in prison, citing a sharp decline in his health after more than five years in solitary confinement. According to the family, Jimmy Lai is suffering from retinal vein occlusion in his right eye, high blood pressure, heart palpitations, and progressive hearing loss.

Claire Lai and Sebastien Lai have expressed hopes that U.S. President Donald Trump could secure the release of their father during his upcoming trip to China.

The trip will last three days beginning on March 31, the White House has confirmed, during which Trump is scheduled to meet Chinese leader Xi Jinping.

Claire Lai was in attendance as a guest of House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.) and Rep. Chris Smith (R-N.J.) for Trump’s State of the Union address on Feb. 24. In a statement a day earlier, Smith said that he and his wife were “deeply inspired by her courageous and tenacious campaign to obtain the release of her father.”

Sen. Mark Warner (D-Va.), vice chairman of the Senate Committee on Intelligence, said in an X post on Feb. 25 that Trump needs to bring up Jimmy Lai during his meeting with Xi.

“Weeks after the sentencing of Hong Kong publisher and democracy advocate Jimmy Lai, Beijing wants the world to move on,” Warner wrote. “We shouldn’t. The President should raise his case when he next meets President Xi.”

Reuters and The Associated Press contributed to this report.



▲ Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan attends a signing ceremony during his official visit to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on Feb. 17, 2026.

Turkey Moves to End Online Anonymity With Mandatory Social Media ID Law

By Owen Evans

Turkey is advancing a major overhaul of social media rules that will require mandatory identity verification for all users.

This month, Turkish Justice Minister Akin Gurlek announced that the new law would end anonymous accounts on social media.

“If a person is going to make a comment or publish an article, their identity will definitely be known. In other words, they will not be able to do this using a fake account, or a fake account from abroad, without identity verification,” Gurlek said in an interview with the newspaper Yeni Safak published on Feb. 15.

Turkey is governed by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s Justice and Development Party, which has been in power since 2002.

Erdogan has served as president since 2014.

According to the newspaper report, the main objective of the law is to prevent the spread of “disinformation” by accounts held by those with unverified identities.

The publication added that under the draft legislation, anyone posting a comment or publishing content will be required to have a clearly identified identity.

In a statement posted on X on Feb. 23, the Freedom of Expression Association, a Turkish free-expression and press-freedom group, said the regulation would construct what it described as a “massive digital panopticon” in which users are continuously observed, profiled, and monitored.

The Panopticon, an 18th-century prison concept developed by philosopher Jeremy Bentham, has since become a

symbol of total surveillance based on the idea of constant, unseen observation.

The Freedom of Expression Association said the proposal would push individuals toward self-censorship because of fear of profiling or prosecution.

“Anonymity is not merely a personal choice; it is the sole guarantee for dissidents, journalists, activists, and disadvantaged groups to express their ideas fearlessly in oppressive regimes,” the group stated.

“Forcing users to make every post with their [identity number] will create a massive chilling effect on society.”

The association added that fear of profiling and legal consequences would not only suppress political criticism but also discourage boycotts, consumer activism, whistleblowing, and allegations of corruption, adding that the regulation amounted to political engineering.

Turkish Minister of Family and Social Services Mahinur Goktas said in a Feb. 12 post on X that officials are working on a social media ban for children.

“Within this scope, we have reached the final stage in our regulation regarding social media use under the age of 15,” she said.

“Our goal is to impose a responsibility on social media platforms. We want them to implement a process similar to the regulations they apply in other countries, here in our own country.

“Our parents are also among the most important stakeholders in this process. However, if we act with the same awareness and responsibility, we can build a safer digital future for our children.”

Grok, which is integrated into X, was blocked in Turkey last year after authorities said the Elon Musk-founded chatbot generated responses insulting Erdogan.

According to a report by the state-

run Anadolu Agency on July 9, Ankara’s chief prosecutor’s office said it had launched an investigation after the Grok chatbot—developed by xAI—generated responses about modern Turkey’s founder, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, and religious values.

The Turkish Penal Code criminalizes insults, especially when made publicly or through digital platforms. Anyone who insults the president can face imprisonment for a term of one to four years.

There is a wider international trend in which governments are advancing laws that, while framed around age verification and child protection, would in practice make online anonymity increasingly difficult.

A handful of countries, including Germany, France, Australia, and Ireland, have implemented age verification to access specified content, from social media access to pornography.

At the end of July, the UK rolled out the most comprehensive national system so far.

Beyond age verification, some political leaders in Western countries have begun questioning the legitimacy of online anonymity itself.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz recently said at an event that online anonymity is a problem, German news agency DPA reported.

“I want to see real names on the internet. I want to know who is speaking,” Merz said on Feb. 25 in Trier, Germany. “In politics, we engage in debates in our society using our real names and without visors. I expect the same from everyone else who critically examines our country and our society.”

The Turkish government did not respond to The Epoch Times’ request for comment by press time.

ENRIQUE CASTRO / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



▲ Mexican soldiers patrol a highway to prevent vehicle fires and road blockades in Michoacán state, Mexico, on Feb. 23, 2026.

CRISTOPHER ROGEL BLANQUET/GETTY IMAGES



▲ Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum speaks during the daily morning briefing in Mexico City on Feb. 23, 2026.

Mexico’s Sheinbaum Weighs Legal Action After Elon Musk Alleges Cartel Ties

By Tom Ozimek

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said she is considering legal action after tech billionaire Elon Musk alleged on social media that she was taking orders from drug cartels.

Speaking at a Feb. 24 news conference in Mexico City, Sheinbaum said government lawyers were reviewing the matter.

“We’re considering whether to take some legal action,” she said. “The lawyers are looking into it, but what matters to me is what the people say, honestly.”

Musk’s allegation of Sheinbaum’s cartel subservience followed the capture and killing of Jalisco New Generation Cartel leader Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes, known as “El Mencho,” by Mexican security forces.

In his post on X, Musk responded to a 2025 video of Sheinbaum discussing cartel violence and saying that returning to a war against the cartels is “not an option” because it would mean extrajudicial killings that are “outside the framework of the law.” She added that military force against the cartels would also be counterproductive because it would trigger retaliatory violence that would only “increase homicides in Mexico.”

Responding to those remarks, Musk alleged that she was “saying what her cartel bosses tell her to say.”

“Let’s just say that their punishment for disobedience is a little worse than a ‘performance improvement plan,’” Musk wrote. He did not provide evidence to support his claims.

Sheinbaum could face difficulty suing Musk for defamation in the United States because of strong legal protections for

free speech. To prevail, she would need to show that Musk knowingly made a false statement or acted with reckless disregard for the truth.

Tesla, Musk’s auto company, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Violence After El Mencho’s Killing Musk’s comments came amid heightened tensions in Mexico following Oseguera’s death.

The cartels are running Mexico. It’s very sad to watch and see what’s happened to that country.

U.S. President Donald Trump

An uneasy calm appeared to be returning to parts of the country on Feb. 25 after the killing of the cartel leader triggered widespread reprisals. The violence paralyzed highways, grounded flights, and forced residents and tourists to shelter in place, particularly in Jalisco state.

Sheinbaum said at the Feb. 24 briefing that authorities were working to restore order after the Feb. 22 military operation in Tapalpa, Jalisco, left Oseguera dead following a shootout.

“Today there was no school, but tomorrow activities are expected to return to normal,” Sheinbaum said. “In the Guadalajara airport, practically all flights have already resumed, and in Puerto Vallarta, little by little, things are returning to normal.”

She said there were still “some” burned

vehicles on the side of the road on Feb. 24 that would be removed later in the day.

Mexico’s Security Cabinet said in a Feb. 24 post on X that affected states were experiencing “a gradual reopening of economic and educational activities, with progressive normalization of mobility and strategic operations,” according to a translation.

More than 50 people were reported killed in the operation and its aftermath, including members of Mexico’s National Guard. The White House said the United States provided intelligence support for the raid.

The Jalisco New Generation Cartel, one of Mexico’s most powerful criminal organizations and a major trafficker of fentanyl and methamphetamine into the United States, responded to Oseguera’s death with coordinated attacks, including vehicle burnings and armed confrontations with security forces.

Sheinbaum also sought to reassure international visitors ahead of the 2026 FIFA World Cup, saying there was no risk to fans traveling to Mexico and that “all the guarantees” for safety were in place.

Trump’s Escalating Pressure

Musk’s criticism mirrors that of U.S. President Donald Trump, who has sharply escalated rhetoric against Mexican cartels and criticized Sheinbaum’s approach.

“The cartels are running Mexico. It’s very sad to watch and see what’s happened to that country,” Trump told Fox News’s Sean Hannity in a Jan. 8 interview.

“They’re killing 250,000, 300,000 in our country every single year.

“We knocked out 97 percent of the drugs coming in by water, and we are going to start now hitting land with regard with the cartels.”

Trump also warned that Mexico needs to “get its act together.”

“You have to do something with Mexico,” Trump told reporters in January. “We’re going to have to do something. We’d love Mexico to do it; they’re capable of doing it, but unfortunately, the cartels are very strong in Mexico.”

He has described Sheinbaum as “afraid”

of the cartels and has suggested that the United States could conduct military strikes on Mexican soil. His administration has intensified anti-cartel measures, including designating certain Mexican syndicates as terrorist organizations.

“Much more remains to be done by Mexico’s government to target cartel leadership, along with their clandestine drug labs, precursor chemical supply chains, and illicit finances,” Trump said in a presidential determination published by the U.S. State Department in September 2025. “Over the next year, the United States will expect to see additional, aggressive efforts by Mexico to hold cartel leaders accountable and disrupt the illicit networks engaged in drug production and trafficking.”

Sheinbaum has repeatedly rejected the prospect of unilateral U.S. intervention, saying it would violate Mexican sovereignty.

“We categorically reject intervention in the internal affairs of other countries,” Sheinbaum said during a news conference in early January. “The history of Latin America is clear and compelling: Intervention has never brought democracy, never generated well-being, nor lasting stability.”

The White House confirmed that the United States provided intelligence support for the operation to capture El Mencho and applauded Mexico’s army for taking down a man who was one of the most wanted criminals in both countries.

“The United States provided intelligence support to the Mexican government in order to assist with an operation ... in which Nemesio ‘El Mencho’ Oseguera Cervantes, an infamous drug lord and leader within the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, was eliminated,” White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said in a Feb. 22 post on X.

Sheinbaum told reporters on Feb. 24 that she expects security to continue to normalize in Mexico following coordinated roadblocks and arson attacks by cartel members after the operation against Oseguera.

Jack Phillips, The Associated Press, and Reuters contributed to this report.

US Blocking Venezuela’s Payment of Maduro’s Legal Fees, Lawyer Claims

By Naveen Athrappully

The U.S. government is preventing Venezuela from paying the legal representation fees for deposed former leader Nicolás Maduro in the ongoing case against him in New York, Maduro’s counsel, Barry J. Pollack, wrote in a letter filed at the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York on Feb. 25.

Maduro was captured by U.S. forces last month and moved to the United States. On Jan. 5, Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, were indicted with a string of charges, including narcoterrorism and conspiracy to import cocaine into the United States.

In the Feb. 20 letter to Judge Alvin K. Hellerstein, who is overseeing the case, Pollack said he had written to court on Jan. 5 that Maduro and the government of Venezuela are subject to sanctions by the Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), and therefore the counsel would need to obtain a license from the OFAC to represent Maduro and obtain attorney’s fees and other costs.

At the time, the court had directed the U.S. Attorney’s Office to work with Maduro’s counsel regarding the OFAC license, according to the letter. On Jan. 7, Maduro and his wife each applied for a license.

“Under Venezuelan law and custom,

the government of Venezuela pays the expenses of the President and First Lady. Accordingly, the license applications specifically sought authorization to represent the respective clients and to accept funds from the government of Venezuela for their respective representations,” the letter reads.

“On January 9, 2026, OFAC granted both licenses. Less than three hours later, however, OFAC, sua sponte and without explanation, amended the license related to the representation of Mr. Maduro (but not the license related to the representation of Ms. Flores). The amended license related to Mr. Maduro does not authorize the receipt of defense costs from the government of Venezuela.”

On Feb. 11, the counsel asked the OFAC to reinstate the original license granted to Maduro, arguing that the agency was interfering with the former Venezuelan leader’s ability to retain counsel and thus breaching his right under the Sixth Amendment to get counsel of his choice, according to the letter.

Since then, the OFAC has allegedly granted several commercial licenses re-

lated to transactions with Venezuela but has failed to honor counsel’s request.

“If OFAC fails to act on the request to reinstate the original license, or denies that request, Mr. Maduro will file a formal motion in the coming days seeking relief from the Court,” Pollack wrote in the letter.

The Epoch Times reached out to the Treasury and the Southern District of New York U.S. Attorney’s Office for comments, but did not receive a response by publication time.

During their court appearance on Jan. 5, Maduro and his wife pleaded not guilty to the charges levied against them.

“I am innocent. I am not guilty of anything that is mentioned here,” Maduro said.

He questioned the legality of his arrest.

Neither Maduro nor his wife sought bail at the time.

At the hearing, Pollack said his client was the “head of a sovereign state and entitled to privilege.”

In a Jan. 11 commentary published by The Epoch Times, defense expert Mike Fredenburg wrote that there is a

lot of evidence that shows Maduro and his Venezuelan regime systematically encouraged, facilitated, and profited from drug trafficking.

For one, Fredenburg said, the Maduro regime appointed Néstor Reverol as interior minister despite U.S. incitements and evidence that he accepted bribes while heading the country’s anti-narcotics unit and tipped off drug traffickers. The regime also shielded Tareck El Aissami, who was sanctioned by the United States in 2017 and later indicted for drug trafficking, he said.

“This pattern of promoting and protecting figures implicated in trafficking drugs, combined with an estimated 200–250 metric tons of cocaine transiting Venezuela annually, shows a deliberate regime-wide tolerance for trafficking,” Fredenburg wrote.

The head of U.S. military operations in Latin America met with acting Venezuelan leader Delcy Rodríguez and cabinet members on Feb. 18 to advance President Donald Trump’s plan to stabilize the country.

This was the first visit to Venezuela by a U.S. military delegation since U.S. forces captured Maduro last month. During the meeting, U.S. officials reiterated Washington’s commitment to a “free, safe and prosperous Venezuela,” according to the U.S. Southern Command.



Chinese Illegal Alien Sentenced to 8 Years in Prison for Fraud Scheme Targeting Elderly

By Frank Fang

A Chinese national who was residing illegally in Los Angeles has been sentenced to eight years in prison for serving as a courier in a fraud scheme that targeted elderly Americans.

He Xiangyang, 41, was sentenced in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Ohio, in Dayton, for conspiring to commit wire and bank fraud, a charge to which he pleaded guilty in November 2024, the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of Ohio announced on Feb. 24.

The scheme defrauded more than \$9.5 million from “various unsuspecting senior citizen victims’ personal bank accounts and retirement funds located in at least 14 states,” according to the indictment.

Under the scheme, He personally collected more than \$500,000 in cash and gold from victims while acting as a courier, prosecutors said.

“Retired Americans unknowingly give away their hard-earned retirement savings to criminals like He, an illegal alien who preyed on a vulnerable population,” Dominick S. Gerace II, U.S. attorney for the Southern District of Ohio, said in a statement.

“This sort of conspiracy uses deceptive tactics and fear to steal millions of dollars in savings and retirement accounts from hardworking Americans. My office will do everything we can to protect our elderly citizens.”

Victims of such fraud schemes are usually contacted via computer message or unsolicited phone call by individuals posing as employees or customer service representatives of legitimate companies, such as Microsoft and Amazon, according to a sentencing memorandum filed by prosecutors on Feb. 23.

Victims are then transferred to someone posing as a “security official” or “government employee,” who claims that the vic-



The Department of Justice in Washington on Aug. 7, 2025.

tims’ IP addresses or financial accounts have been compromised or linked to criminal activity, prosecutors said.

To gain victims’ trust, scammers provide fake company employee identification numbers and the names of real government officials. In the sentencing memorandum, prosecutors named the Federal Trade Commission as one of the government agencies the scammers claimed to represent.

“Conspirators then threaten these victims who have little or no experience with the criminal justice system with arrest warrants and seizure of their life savings if they do not cooperate with the investigation,” prosecutors wrote.

“While under the stress of fictitious criminal exposure, conspirators convince victims the only way to ‘cleanse’ or ‘detangle’ their funds from the international criminal activity is to withdraw their life savings and put them in ‘secure’ government accounts.”

The fraud would often continue until scammers learned that victims had “very little money left in their accounts,” after which they cut off communication, according to the sentencing memorandum.

Prosecutors also detailed the victims He encountered during the scheme in the sentencing memorandum.

He made his first pickup from a 75-year-old male victim in Orem, Utah, in February 2024.

From late February until early April 2024, He traveled to six different states, including New York, Utah, Minnesota, and Florida, to pick up 17 packages from victims who were 65 or older. The packages included \$35,000 to \$73,000 in cash or gold.

On April 4, 2024, He traveled to Ohio to pick up funds from a victim and was later arrested.

“At the time of his arrest, He told

agents that he was in the area looking for construction work, which was clearly not true, indicating he knew the wrongfulness of his actions,” prosecutors wrote in the sentencing memorandum.

Prosecutors said He took part in the scheme to “financially support himself and his family” and recommended that the court sentence the defendant to at least 51 months in prison.

His lawyer, in a sentencing memorandum filed in March 2025, told the court that his client “was not aware of the full scope of the conspiracy” and should not be sentenced to more than 51 months in prison.

“Mr. He understands that his actions were wrong and regrets that victims were financially harmed due to his involvement in illegal activity,” the lawyer wrote.

The Epoch Times contacted He’s lawyer but didn’t receive a response.

Iceland to Hold Referendum on Restarting EU Accession Talks, Prime Minister Says

By Victoria Friedman

Icelandic Prime Minister Kristrun Frostadottir said during a visit to Poland on Feb. 25 that Reykjavik will hold a referendum “in the coming months” on restarting European Union accession talks.

Iceland abandoned EU membership talks in 2013 after four years of negotiations. The Nordic island already has access to the EU’s single market through its membership of the European Economic Area and the Schengen open border travel zone.

“In the coming months, we are going to have a referendum on opening up the negotiations, the accession negotiations for Iceland to possibly join the EU,” Frostadottir said during a joint press conference with Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk.

She said that reopening the talks was about “opening an opportunity” for Iceland and pursuing better integration for the

country into the bloc. She said Iceland has a lot to bring to the EU through membership.

“We have been able to develop our resources in a positive way. We’ve been able to drive [gross domestic product] growth in the right direction. We have had a good welfare system. We have solid values, and we have respect for one another. A lot of these are underlying values that we see in the European community as a whole,” Frostadottir said.

Iceland’s center-left government, which came to power after a snap election in 2024, had promised to hold a public vote on joining the bloc by 2027.

The prime minister said that her government “will listen to whatever the Icelandic population wants to do.”

Potential New EU Members by 2030

The EU is an economic and political union made up of 27 member states.

Several countries are attempting to join the union, including Ukraine and Albania. According to the European Commission—the EU’s executive branch—the bloc could welcome new members by 2030.

The commission released its latest annual enlargement report in November 2025.

EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas described the accession process as one that requires candidates to align with the bloc’s foreign and security policies, committing to supporting free media, “cleaning up corruption,” and “cementing the rule of law.”

“Joining the EU remains a fair, tough and merit-based process. But new countries joining the EU by 2030 is a realistic goal,” Kallas said in a Nov. 4, 2025, statement. “Expanding the EU is in our best interest. It’s a long-term investment in our security, economy, and global edge. Through enlargement Europe can grow its geopolitical power.”



▲ Protesters demand a referendum amid a government bid to pull out of EU accession talks in Reykjavik, Iceland, on Feb. 24, 2014.

Countries on the path to joining are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey, and Ukraine. Croatia joined in 2013.

The EU lost a member on Jan. 31, 2020, when the UK officially left the bloc following the June 2016 referendum vote to leave. The UK had been a member since 1973, when the bloc was called the European Economic Community.

Reuters contributed to this report.



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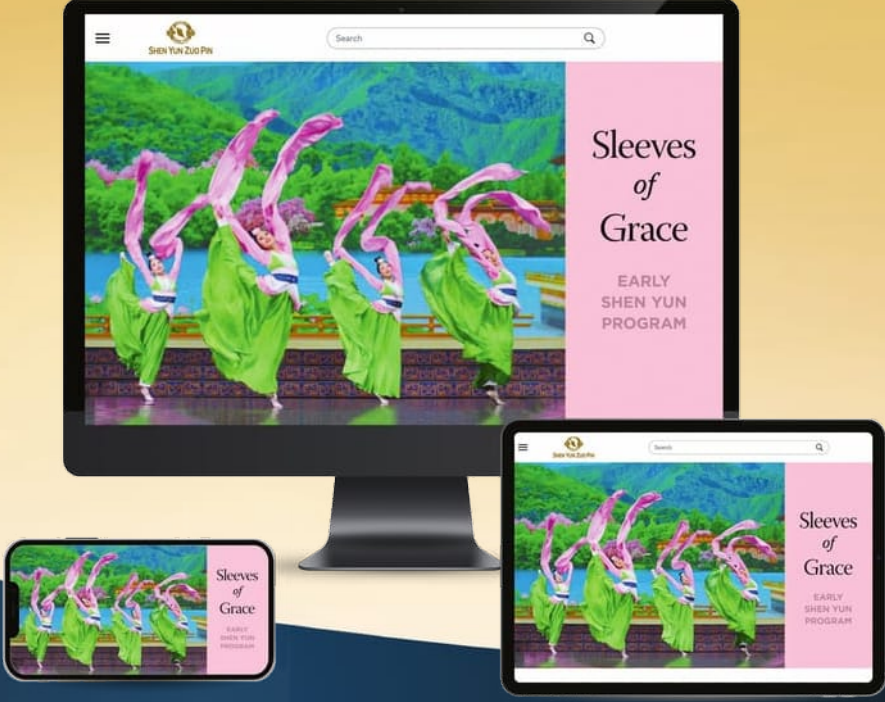
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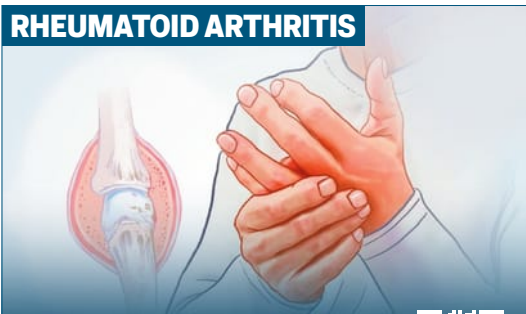
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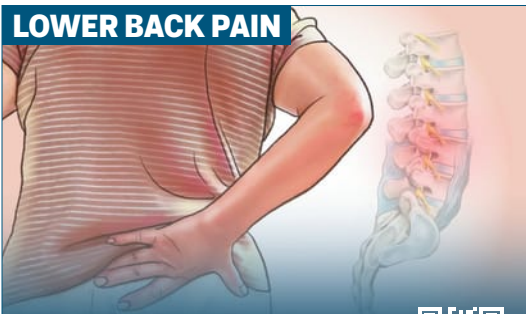
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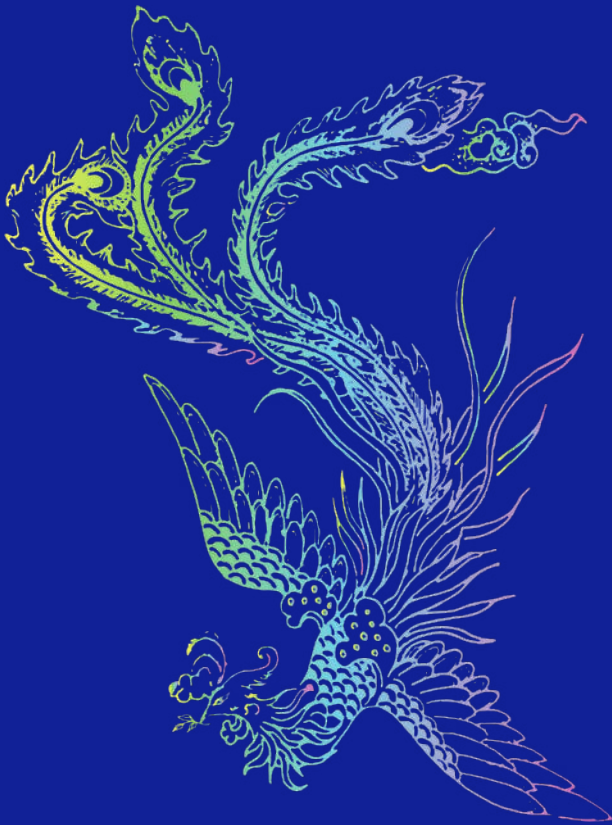
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Tariffs Won't Likely Fix the Trade Deficit

By Jeffrey A. Tucker | A18

Opinion

THE EPOCH TIMES

A17 FRIDAY, FEB. 27, 2026



Washington and Beijing Push the Yuan in the Same Direction but for Very Different Reasons

By Milton Ezrati | A21

MARIO TAMA/GETTY IMAGES



▲ A container ship and shipping cranes at the Port of Los Angeles on Feb. 20, 2026.

Supreme Court Tariff Ruling: Fears of a \$200 Billion Refund Are Unjustified

By Daniel Lacalle



The market's reaction to the Supreme Court's ruling on the Liberation Day tariffs exaggerates the negatives and ignores the options available to the Trump administration.

Markets are overreacting to headlines about a \$175 billion to \$200 billion financial hole from a tariff refund. However, the Supreme Court ruling opens a long, narrow, and manageable process, not an imminent fiscal crisis.

In the days after the Supreme Court struck down President Donald Trump's Liberation Day tariffs, many sell-side analysts turned a complex legal ruling into a simple story, stating that Washington would soon have to repay up to \$200 billion. Risk premiums in Treasuries ticked higher, gold and silver soared, and some commentators warned of a looming refund shock to the U.S. budget that would push government debt higher.

Does the Supreme Court ruling really mean that the Treasury must repay every dollar collected since these tariffs were introduced?

The reality is far more complex.

The Trump administration has many options to maintain its trade policy.

The Supreme Court did not rule any of the agreed-upon trade deals or tariff mechanisms illegal. The Biden, Obama, Bush, and Clinton administrations have all implemented tariffs.

Furthermore, if any country decided to reject the deals that have been signed, which is unlikely, the Trump administration can use Section 122 of the 1974 Trade Act to impose 10 percent tariffs for 150 days, which is what was announced on Feb. 20. This allows tariffs or import surcharges when there is a balance-of-payments-related emergency.

Furthermore, Section 338 of the 1930 Tariff Act allows tariffs as high as 50 percent on countries that discriminate against U.S. commerce, while Section 232 uses Commerce Department investigations to impose duties on specific

products and Section 301 targets countries and sectors after U.S. trade representative investigations into unreasonable practices.

These mechanisms have been used by all administrations in the past. In fact, the Biden administration kept all the tariffs imposed by the first Trump administration.

When we look at the Supreme Court decision, it is more about how tariffs were announced, not the mechanics of trade litigation and tariffs.

The risk of repaying collected tariffs exists, but the timeline is long, the effective amount is likely much smaller than \$200 billion, and the U.S. economy can easily absorb it. In fact, the Supreme Court's decision may result in no change to the existing trade deals.

Those who represent the mainstream consensus have written extensively complaining about Trump's tariffs. However, I have read nothing about the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, a massive tariff scheme designed only to raise prices. The Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism is the most protectionist scheme seen in global trade in years, hidden under the "carbon" excuse to impose a monster tax system.

Tariffs are not Trump's invention; they are the norm in global trade. The current trade deals have proven to be positive for global trade, growth, and all parties involved. Canceling these deals would be exceedingly negative for all exporting nations. Furthermore, a global 10 percent tariff under Section 122 could yield \$300 billion to \$400 billion per year, compared with the current customs revenue of more than \$200 billion in 2025 and \$77 billion in 2024.

Countries that have signed trade deals with the United States should know better than to break the existing agreements,

as the new tariffs post-Supreme Court ruling would rise, and no new administration would change that, as happened with former President Joe Biden.

The Supreme Court ruled that the specific use of emergency powers—the International Emergency Economic Powers Act—to impose certain tariffs is unlawful but did not issue an order to refund collected duties.

The ruling creates a pathway for challenges, according to trade lawyers, but it does not mean that the government must return every dollar. There is a huge difference between finding that a measure was unlawful and an enforceable ruling for every affected importer to receive a refund.

Only exporters that have preserved their rights, including through protests, suspensions of liquidation, and timely filings, can realistically claim refunds. Most businesses will likely choose not to litigate. Furthermore, as the cost of tariffs has been absorbed by most of the value chain, they have little incentive to fight.

In previous trade disputes, only a small fraction of companies pursued claims, and an even smaller

group recovered the full amount of what was paid. This is not a universal tax rebate. It is a complex, legally intensive process that many companies have already missed the window to access.

There is an enormous difference between the total amount of tariffs collected, about \$200 billion, the legally claimable and filed amounts, and the refunds after litigation, settlements, and denials.

For exporters, claiming the collected duties would be a legal nightmare and commercial suicide, with the risk of losing more than they can claim.

Cases will now go back to the Court of International Trade and lower courts. Each claim must be processed, argued, and decided, and there will be appeals.

Tariffs are not Trump's invention; they are the norm in global trade. The current trade deals have proven to be positive for global trade, growth, and all parties involved.

Trade and customs disputes can take years. What some banks treat as a headline figure—a \$200 billion refund—is likely to end as a much smaller, probably nonexistent, netted-out fiscal cost. Furthermore, many of these businesses will likely face the risk of losing access to the lucrative U.S. market during the lengthy and complex litigation process.

Even if the net refund ended up at \$100 billion to \$150 billion, divided over three to five years, it would average \$20 billion to \$50 billion annually—insignificant in budget terms.

At more than \$30 trillion in gross domestic product (GDP), even a \$150 billion refund amounts to barely 0.5 percent of U.S. output. Furthermore, the imposition of a 10 percent global tariff would generate more than \$300 billion per year, according to estimates, which is 50 percent more than the amount claimed by headlines as a possible refund.

Meanwhile, the U.S. economy is strengthening, with fourth-quarter private sector GDP rising by 2.4 percent thanks to robust consumption and investment, while government spending is falling, which deducts a percentage point from GDP but is a policy decision to control debt and deficits. Inflation is declining, job creation is accelerating, and the manufacturing sector is expanding.

Investors may fear legal uncertainty around trade policy, but not a one-time refund. For all the talk of a \$200 billion black hole, the true risk is a prolonged period of legal wrangling, shifting tariff measures, and noise in trade data, not a fiscal cliff. That is why I believe that trade partners will prefer to maintain existing deals rather than enter a lengthy, painful litigation process that may result in a higher tariff bill for exporters.

Daniel Lacalle, Ph.D., is chief economist at hedge fund Tressis and author of the best-selling books "Freedom or Equality" (2020), "Escape from the Central Bank Trap" (2017), "The Energy World Is Flat" (2015), and "Life in the Financial Markets."



Tariffs Won't Likely Fix the Trade Deficit

By Jeffrey A. Tucker

 It's to President Donald Trump's credit that he sounded the alarm on American economic prospects, particularly as regards manufacturing. It should strike anyone as alarming and strangely unusual that the greatest manufacturing country in the world, dominant in every industry with skills and infrastructure stretching coast to coast, would in the course of 50 years have it all nearly gutted.

To be sure, I have many friends who think this is no big deal. Let others make stuff. We buy it. We get goods, they get paper. It's all fine. Is it really? It's not war, and we do adjust. The economy has been financialized, and the United States does excel in services and at least one natural resource (oil). Why do we need also to produce pianos, watches, boats, tools, toys, textiles, apparel, steel, agriculture, home electronics, and chips? Let others do that while we enjoy the fruits.

If we go back 200 years in the writings defending free trade, they nowhere said it would be just great if an entire country were to give up its specialization in every manufacturing process that made it great. It would have been intolerable to any nation in the 18th and 19th centuries to undertake such a policy. And indeed, it did not happen for one technical reason: every trading partner was on the gold standard. Accounts settled. No country faced a permanent and unresolved advantage in the cost basis of wages and materials.

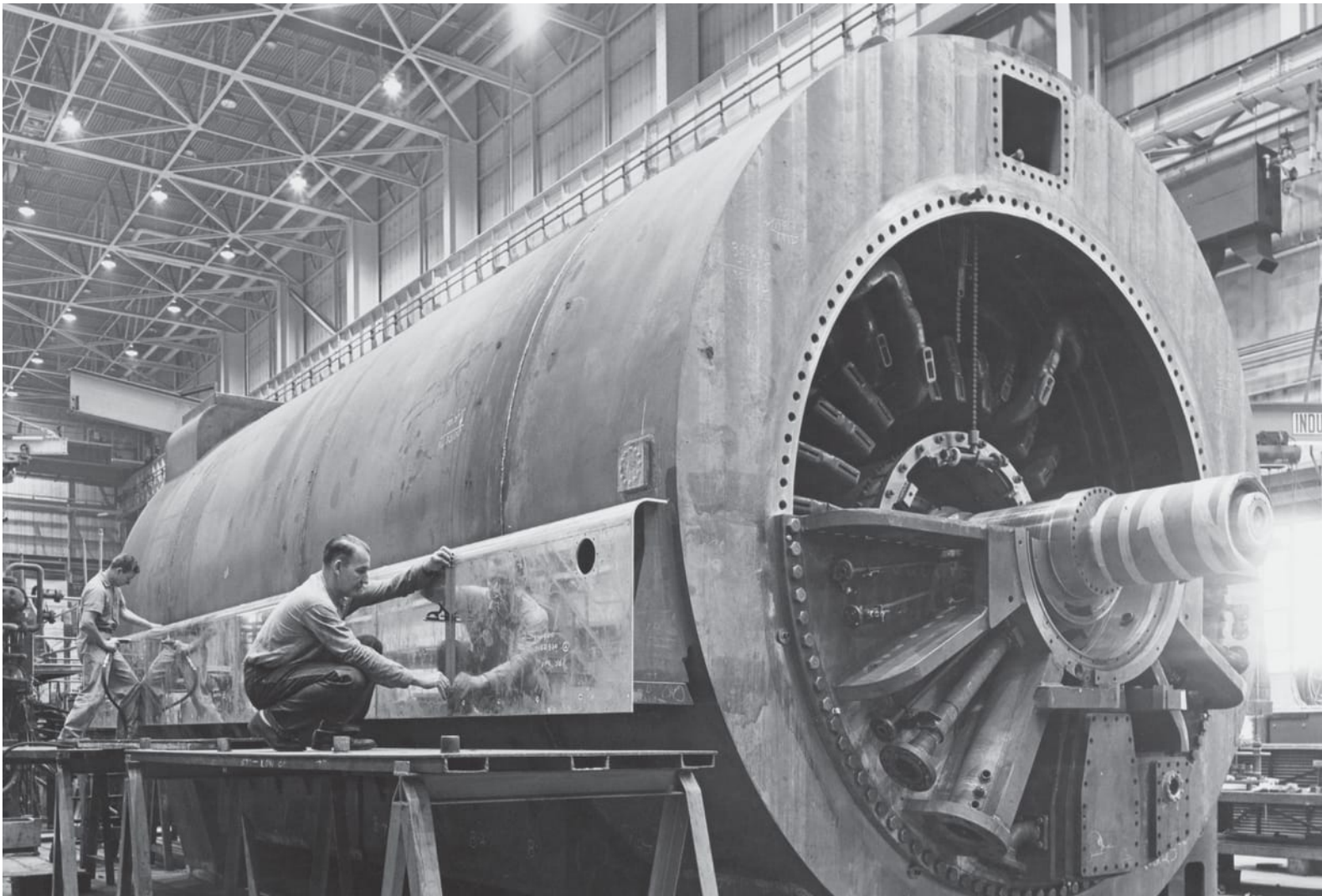
All that changed following World War II and the Nixon economic shock of 1971. The dollar became the world reserve currency, and eventually, its gold backing was entirely removed. As a result, there was a limitless demand for dollars overseas and a huge manufacturing advantage for every country in the world that was not the United States. While the United States gained seeming prestige as a military power, it gradually lost all advantage as a powerhouse that made things.

The problem traces to persistent cost differentials that are shored by the global demand for the dollar, which is a main U.S. export. This is reflected in the trade deficit that has only worsened since the end of the Bretton Woods system. To be clear, the problem is not the trade deficit as such but what it signals as a nation of exporters versus importers. Something dramatic changed. This should be obvious, and it is not unconvincing.

The theory of Trump's solution of tariffs was to even the playing field. It would charge a tax on imports as a proxy for what was currency settlement in the old days. It was a novel theory, and no one would say with empirical certainty or proof that it would not achieve at least some of the objective. The danger of course is that by turning the United States into an economic fort, it creates a range of industries that are unsustainable without the tariff-created walled garden. That is a genuine danger.

What's actually surprising, however, is that the tariffs have not shrunk the U.S. trade deficit. Lately and incredibly it has started to worsen even in the presence of higher tariffs than we've had in a century.

What's gone wrong? China, Germany, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, and many other countries have doubled down on their



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exporting strategy by further subsidizing industry in a way that leaps over the tariff wall, while relying on the United States as the importer of choice. It works because the differential between U.S. business costs, including salaries and wages, and those of the rest of the world is vast. That's a consequence of U.S. dollar dominance. There seems to be no way to get around it.

In addition, these countries are working on other ways to lower business costs, such as cuts in taxes and regulations, making them more and not less competitive. It's like a race where the winners keep beating the upstarts with steroids and rocket shoes. It's becoming ever more clear that no amount of tariffs is going to fix this problem. They only end up raising costs for American importers and U.S. manufacturers and consumers. This is a strategy of taxing one's own people in order to punish foreigners—which, quite frankly, doesn't make sense. In any case, it's not working.

Trump is obviously very wedded to the tariff strategy, and I doubt anything can change that. But there are other ways to fight this war, among them lowering the value of the dollar internationally relative to other countries. That would change the economic calculation dramatically, but it is not easily done. Another path is more direct: put every effort into lowering American business costs, from taxes to regulations. The Trump administration has been fantastic on many environmental regulations, but there remain huge problems in health insurance mandates and high payroll taxes from U.S. laborers. Those all need dramatic reduction to make the United States more competitive, else we'll never win this.

The United States has undertaken terrible policy mistakes over half a century. The carnage is all around us: burned-out infrastructure in major cities, loss of purpose, wasted human skill, traditions shattered, and communities devastated. American

▲ A section of a turbine generator is prepared for shipping from the manufacturing plant of the Westinghouse Electric Corporation in East Pittsburgh, Pa., in 1960.

Tariffs are a blunt instrument that have so far not achieved their promise, even in the narrow sense of reducing the trade deficit.

productivity was not entirely vanquished but rather migrated to finance, medical services, and government. Such changes will take a long time to repair, but the problem is not irreversible.

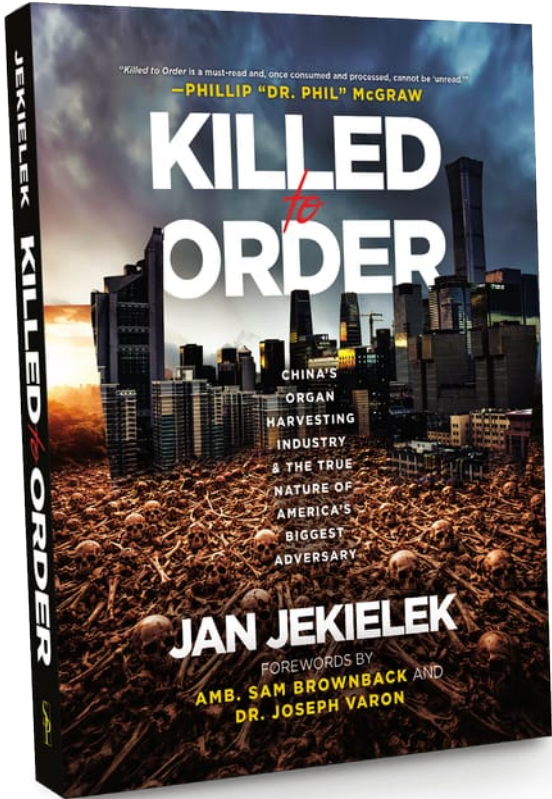
Tariffs are a blunt instrument that have so far not achieved their promise, even in the narrow sense of reducing the trade deficit. Other ideas will prove more fruitful. Hard work to free up the medical insurance market, reduce and eliminate the payroll tax, obliterate bureaucracy, and fire up the engines of American entrepreneurship will prove more sustainable over the long term.

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 Lock-down." 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.

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▲ A container ship at the Port of Los Angeles as vehicles drive nearby on Feb. 20, 2026.



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National Security, Glyphosate, and Accountability

By Mollie Engelhart



Let me begin with clarity. I oppose the widespread use of chemical inputs in our food system. My life’s work centers on building soil biology, integrating livestock, and reducing reliance on synthetic fertilizers and herbicides. I do not believe that we should be using glyphosate at the volume we are using it today.

At the same time, two things can be true.

President Donald Trump recently invoked national security authority to prioritize domestic production of certain agricultural chemicals, including glyphosate. On a narrow strategic level, he is not wrong to identify a vulnerability. U.S. agriculture is heavily dependent on glyphosate, particularly in commodity row-crop production. Portions of the supply chain rely on overseas manufacturing. If that supply were disrupted abruptly, major sectors of U.S. agriculture would face real operational strain.

Food is national security. A system dependent on inputs that we do not fully control is, by definition, vulnerable.

But that reality forces a deeper question: Should we be this dependent in the first place?

If the disappearance of a single herbicide could destabilize large portions of our food production system, that signals fragility. A resilient agricultural system adapts. It does not collapse because one chemical becomes scarce. The long-term solution should be reducing dependency, not cementing it.

We can debate whether invoking national security authority was appropriate. What is more troubling is the liability shield extended to manufacturers operating under this framework.

Two realities can coexist. Glyphosate dependency is a strategic vulnerability. Shielding manufacturers from accountability is a policy mistake.

Bayer, which acquired Monsanto in 2018, has already paid approximately \$10 billion to settle tens of thousands of Roundup-related lawsuits alleging that glyphosate exposure caused non-Hodgkin lymphoma. In addition to those payouts, the company has publicly disclosed billions of dollars more—commonly reported in the \$6 billion to \$7 billion range—reserved to address unresolved and future claims.

That means that the company has already paid out more than it has set aside for the remaining pipeline of litigation.

Corporations do not arrive at those numbers casually. They assess verdict trends, settlement averages, appellate outcomes, and scientific rulings. They model exposure carefully because shareholders demand it. The fact that roughly \$10 billion has already been paid demonstrates both the scale of litigation and the seriousness of the legal risk.

Whether \$6 billion to \$7 billion will



Workers spray against insects and weeds inside the orchards of a fruit farm in Mesa, Calif., on March 27, 2020.

ultimately be sufficient remains to be seen. But the history of payouts suggests that the exposure has been substantial.

That context makes the liability shield harder to ignore.

Liability is one of the few mechanisms that pressure corporations to improve safety. Public companies have a fiduciary duty to maximize shareholder value. If harm results in significant financial loss, there is an incentive to reformulate, improve warnings, invest in alternatives, or mitigate risk. If liability is limited or shielded, that pressure weakens.

For years, chemical manufacturers have sought expanded liability protections through state preemption laws and federal legislative channels. Efforts have appeared in state pesticide-labeling debates and in discussions surrounding federal agricultural legislation. When those efforts faced resistance, national security authority became another path.

This is not an argument that glyphosate has no strategic relevance. It is an argument that accountability should not disappear when strategic relevance is invoked.

Regulatory agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency maintain that glyphosate is safe when used according to label directions. At the same time, the International Agency for Research on Cancer classified glyphosate in 2015 as “probably carcinogenic to humans.” Courts have seen juries award substantial verdicts to plaintiffs alleging harm, although appeals and ongoing litigation continue to shape the legal landscape.

Scientific disagreement exists. Legal disagreement exists. Public trust is divided.

That is precisely why liability matters.

If manufacturers are confident in the safety of their products, the courtroom remains the proper venue to demonstrate that. Shielding liability while litigation

continues suggests that protecting production stability is being prioritized over resolving public concern.

This decision also conflicts with the principles many voters associate with the Make America Healthy Again coalition. That movement has emphasized reducing toxic burden, restoring soil health, and rebuilding trust between citizens and institutions. Many supporters believed that accountability would return to food and health systems.

Declaring glyphosate strategically important addresses supply vulnerability. Limiting manufacturer liability addresses corporate exposure. Those are distinct policy choices.

It is possible to acknowledge that our agricultural system currently depends heavily on glyphosate while also insisting that such dependency is a structural weakness. It is possible to support strong national security policy while rejecting special protections that insulate powerful corporations from legal consequences.

If glyphosate’s absence would create instability, that should motivate

diversification—expanded crop rotations, integrated livestock systems, mechanical weed management, cover cropping, and investment in regenerative models that reduce chemical reliance. True resilience means decreasing single-point vulnerabilities.

Food security is national security. Soil health is national security. Decentralization is national security.

When liability is removed while chemical dependence remains, we are not strengthening the system. We are protecting scale.

Two realities can coexist. Glyphosate dependency is a strategic vulnerability. Shielding manufacturers from accountability is a policy mistake.

If we want a food system that is secure, healthy, and trusted, accountability cannot be optional.

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.”



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

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Taiwan: Silicon Shield or Silicon Extortion?

By Anders Corr



Taiwan and the United States have agreed to a set of deals that will remove or reduce 99 percent of Taiwan's tariffs on U.S. exports and facilitate up to \$250 billion of Taiwanese investment in the United States. The deals have security implications because they support U.S. semiconductor reshoring, which erodes Taiwan's "silicon shield" but will help protect these strategic assets from a Chinese invasion. The deals took place in the run-up to a U.S.-China summit in April, which is an indication that the Trump administration is not backing down from U.S. national security interests to get a better trade deal with China. Other indicators, however, are still being watched. These include whether the United States completes a planned \$11 billion arms sale to Taiwan and further restricts Chinese routers and telecom company operations in the United States. The Taiwan trade deal, however, is all good news. It will facilitate investment into the United States, including industrial parks and chip manufacturing, which will hopefully reshore and better protect the most important artificial intelligence chip production related to national security. To this end, the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. (TSMC) plans to invest \$165 billion. In exchange, the company will be allowed to export its chips to the United States with lower tariffs. The other goal of the trade deal is to achieve reciprocal trade with Taiwan, the United States' fourth-largest trade partner. In 2025, the United States had a trade deficit of more than \$127 billion with Taiwan. When the United States has a trade deficit with Taiwan, it means that Taiwan exports more to the United States than it imports. The total U.S. trade deficit has to be paid for and is generally done through selling dollars, debt, or immovable assets such as



ANNABELLE CHIH/GETTY IMAGES

real estate. This has gradually internationalized the economic power structure in the United States and empowered some U.S. adversaries, most importantly the Chinese Communist Party. At the same time, China flooded the United States with cheap consumer goods and made China central to international trade. As long as international investors want U.S. currency, debt, and immovable assets, countries are willing to run trade surpluses. The U.S. trade deal will narrow the deficit with Taiwan through easier U.S. exports to the country between 2025 and 2029. This will include more than \$44 billion in oil and liquefied natural gas, more than \$25 billion in industrial equipment, and more than \$15 billion in aircraft. Taiwan will also buy more food, autos, pharmaceuticals, and chemicals. Tariffs as high as 40 percent will drop to 10 percent, and most will be reduced or eliminated entirely. Other disagreements between the United

States and Taiwan have not been fully resolved. The United States wants Taiwan to end its alleged practice of backdoor currency manipulation, which has contributed to the undervaluation of the New Taiwan dollar by as much as 60 percent. Taiwan disputes this claim. The deal is a win for Taiwan, and therefore for democracy. U.S. imports from Taiwan will generally be tariffed at the same preferential 15 percent rate enjoyed by Japan and South Korea. Previously, U.S. tariffs on Taiwan were 20 percent. The reduced tariff on Taiwan will apply to semiconductors, Taiwan's largest export to the United States. In this way, the agreement supports Taiwan's semiconductor industry even as it pushes Taiwan to invest more in U.S. semiconductor manufacturing. Reshoring Taiwan's chip fabs to the United States helps Taiwan just as much as it helps the United States. In case of a People's Liberation Army invasion of Taiwan, the chip

fabs that Taiwan builds in the United States would still be protected. Taiwan sometimes argues that its chip fabs act as a "silicon shield" that forces the United States to protect it or lose access to powerful semiconductors. However, this is a bad strategy for Taiwan in the long term, as Washington will not want to let itself be leveraged in this way. From the viewpoint of Washington, the "silicon shield" sounds more like "silicon extortion." Democracies will have to move key assets, such as chip fabs, to the most protected locations, including in the United States, if they are to defend themselves long-term against autocracies. The new trade agreement has symbolism, as it is with Taiwan, an island democracy claimed by the Chinese Communist Party. Yet the Chinese Communist Party never ruled Taiwan. And the agreement comes two months before President Donald Trump's planned visit to China. Brokering a major deal with Taiwan so near to the talks in China will likely improve Trump's bargaining leverage. There is more the United States can do to support democracy in Taiwan. After a record-breaking \$11 billion deal that the Trump administration agreed to export U.S. arms to Taiwan, we could and should reconfirm that we will not discuss those or any other U.S. arms sales with Beijing. Our military exports to a fellow democracy such as Taiwan should never be frittered away as a bargaining chip. Regardless, the latest U.S.-Taiwan trade deal is great for both countries from both a commercial and security perspective. It will improve regional security in Asia, including through its support to Taiwan's semiconductor manufacturing industry. Taiwan's chip fabs will enjoy lower tariffs and incentives to reshore production to a safer locale such as the United States, thereby improving U.S. national security.

Anders Corr has a bachelor's/master's in political science from Yale University (2001) and a doctorate in government from Harvard University (2008). He is a principal at Corr Analytics Inc. and publisher of the Journal of Political Risk, and he has conducted extensive research in North America, Europe, and Asia. His latest books are "The Concentration of Power: Institutionalization, Hierarchy, and Hegemony" (2021) and "Great Powers, Grand Strategies: the New Game in the South China Sea" (2018).

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Washington and Beijing Push the Yuan in the Same Direction but for Very Different Reasons

By Milton Ezrati



The U.S. Treasury has gone on record encouraging Beijing to raise the yuan’s value against the U.S. dollar. The authorities in Beijing, most especially the People’s Bank of China (PBOC), seem willing, indeed eager, to comply with Washington’s wishes. Despite the apparent goodwill and agreement, the two parties are hardly on the same page.

Washington is thinking in terms of trade. A strong yuan will raise the prices of Chinese goods on global markets, including in the United States, and slow the flow of Chinese exports, effectively exaggerating the effect of the tariffs imposed on Chinese goods.

China has embraced the advice not because it wants to comply with the U.S. Treasury but rather because Beijing seems to care less about trade these days than about the internationalization of the yuan and Chinese leader Xi Jinping’s ambition to see the yuan eventually supplant the U.S. dollar as the main medium of international exchange and store of value, what bankers and economists refer to as the “global reserve currency.” Of the two motivations, Washington’s is the more immediate and practical.

The U.S. Treasury seems to be working from Beijing’s old playbook. For a long time, Chinese policy sought to suppress the yuan’s foreign exchange value. By keeping the yuan cheap, China’s exports would carry attractively low prices on world markets, most notably in the United States, encouraging exports and boosting China’s overall pace of growth. The PBOC actively entered currency markets to target a cheap yuan.

Especially during U.S. President Donald Trump’s first term, Washing-

ton decried this currency strategy. In 2017, Trump accused China of being “grand champions at manipulation of currency.” Currency manipulation is a term of law that would invite U.S. retaliation and may support a case for it with the World Trade Organization.

Officials at the White House and the U.S. Treasury received a kind of confirmation that Beijing was engaging in yuan manipulation when the yuan’s value fell by more than 14 percent against the U.S. dollar right after the Trump administration imposed tariffs in 2018 and 2019. That drop reduced the price of Chinese exports to Americans sufficiently to offset the effect of the tariffs. Accordingly, after a brief interruption, Chinese exports to the United States continued to rise, seemingly unaffected by the tariffs.

This is the past. China is no longer working off a trade-centered playbook, or at least seems not to be. Beijing has made clear that it is more concerned now with the internationalization of the yuan.

To some extent, both parties can win in this exchange. Washington can get its way on trade, while Beijing leverages the strength of its currency.

Since the first Trump term, Beijing has actively pursued trade deals that settle in yuan instead of U.S. dollars, as most trade deals do even when an American is not involved. It has actively advanced international yuan-denominated loans, most notably within the Belt and Road Initiative, although not exclusively there. A stronger yuan



▲ Chinese yuan bills, worth thousands of dollars, in Vancouver, Canada, on Oct. 27, 2015.

on foreign exchange markets helps this internationalization effort. The PBOC has set successive yuan targets accordingly.

The yuan has appreciated against the U.S. dollar by fully 5 percent in just the past 10 months, with little interruption. That move has increased the price of Chinese goods to Americans, effectively exaggerating the effect of the tariffs that the White House put in place on Chinese goods last year.

The tariffs alone contributed to an almost 40 percent drop in China’s exports to the United States between March 2025 and November 2025. The yuan appreciation will reinforce that downward momentum. Washington, with its focus on trade, wants more of the same. China, with its focus on internationalization, wants to give it.

To some extent, both parties can win in this exchange. Washington can get its way on trade, while Beijing leverages the strength of its currency. The timing of these wins, however, is likely

to be very different. What Washington wants is immediate. Beijing is playing a much longer game and will not achieve its objective—if it ever does—for some time to come, especially because supplanting the U.S. dollar as the global reserve currency will require many other difficult adjustments from Beijing. If Washington has mistaken Beijing’s thinking, it still might gain from the exchange.

Milton Ezrati is a contributing editor at The National Interest, an affiliate of the Center for the Study of Human Capital at the University at Buffalo (SUNY), and chief economist for Vested, a New York-based communications firm. Before joining Vested, he served as chief market strategist and economist for Lord, Abbett & Co. He also writes frequently for City Journal and blogs regularly for Forbes. His latest book is “Thirty Tomorrows: The Next Three Decades of Globalization, Demographics, and How We Will Live.”

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For Polling, It’s All About the Questions

By **Jeffrey A. Tucker**



This past December, a poll began to circulate around Washington that caused a sudden shift in messaging from the White House and beyond. It had a stark conclusion: “Republican and Democratic candidates who support eliminating long-standing vaccine requirements will pay a price in the election. ... Vaccine skepticism is bad politics.”

Sheryl Gay Stolberg of the New York Times identified this poll as the one that rattled Republicans. “Just one in five voters approves of rolling back established vaccine recommendations,” she summarized. As a result, the political environment on the topic suddenly changed. The vaccine industry is off the hook.

Curious, I took a closer look at the poll. It turns out to be constructed to come up with precisely that conclusion. I will explain more below, but consider that every poll has this problem. Anyone can get answers they want provided that the questions are framed in a certain way.

That’s not to say that people don’t have real opinions on matters. These opinions are worth discovering. The trouble traces to the interfacing between the poll creator and the polled person.

In the most famous case, support for Trump as president has been consistently underestimated for 10 years. The reason is that people are reluctant on the margin to admit their views, knowing full well that the mainstream media cannot stand the guy. So the polled person often takes the easy route.

This is called the social desirability bias. This is a polling/survey error in which respondents give answers that they think are more socially acceptable or approved of, rather than their true views. That means the results end up underreporting undesirable behaviors or opinions (support for a polarizing figure) and overreporting desirable ones.

A pollster with an agenda can use this bias. Let’s say you want a poll to reveal vast support for carbon taxes and the Green New Deal. You could field a question such as this one: “Do you agree with the scientific consensus that climate change is both real and a problem?” What do you think the results would be? I’m guessing that 75 percent would agree.

But you could put it another way: “Do you favor new taxes on fuel and other controls to curb carbon in the hopes that this will change the climate in 20 years?” I’m guessing that the results would be the opposite. The difference is that the first question encourages people to say yes and the second one invites them to



say what they really think. Again, it’s not that people have opinions that blow with the wind. It’s that being polled is inherently intimidating. Even tiny changes in wording can make a big difference in the outcome. Polling companies know this and respond to their clients. If “Citizens Against Climate Change” funds the poll, it is going to turn out to favor their agenda.

There are plenty of other biases, such as the type of people willing to be polled at all. A few years ago, for example, a polling company called me to ask my opinions on various national matters. I was willing to answer questions. But even before the survey began, I fielded questions about my race, age, income, living arrangements, job, and so on. I was already on the hot seat. I hung up simply because I’m unwilling to share with a stranger personal details that I wouldn’t even tell a cousin.

With all of this in mind, let’s now look at this poll that claims to show that vaccine skepticism is a political loser. It begins with a statement and asks whether you agree or disagree. The statement is: “Vaccines save lives.” Can you imagine the results? Among Kamala Harris voters, it is 99 percent. Among Trump voters, it is 75 percent. Among swing voters, it is 83 percent.

The question itself is preposterous. To answer no to it, you would have to believe that in the 228 years since the invention of vaccines, no lives have been saved. Not from smallpox and not from rabies. That’s completely ridiculous. It is rather obvious



▲ A nurse prepares to administer a vaccine in Los Angeles on Jan. 19, 2022.

that vaccines have saved lives. It’s not even in dispute. That a quarter of Trump voters said no is actually astonishing. A second statement reads: “Vaccines are the best defense against many infectious diseases.” Once again, it is nearly impossible to disagree with that statement. Sure enough, 70 percent to 90 percent of people are compelled to agree.

This is how you build a biased poll, not with obvious language but with little sprinkles that trigger the mind in a certain direction.

For sterilizing vaccines such as measles or chickenpox, they do indeed provide the best defense against getting the disease. The statement does not address whether getting the infection when you are young is a better approach for gaining lasting and broad immunity—which is hardly disputed either. But the statement does not allow for that subtle distinction.

In other words, this part of the poll is wholly invalid. Now to the next part, which attempts to measure how important issues of vaccines are to voters. The poll asks people to rank the importance of these issues. Notice which ones are easy, which ones are harder, and which of the eight lends itself to a solid “not interested.”

1. Require labeling of harmful ingredients and chemicals in ultra-processed foods
2. Remove toxic chemicals and pesticides in agricultural practices
3. Remove from foods and beverages dyes and artificial ingredients, such as red dye 40 and high fructose corn syrup
4. Restrict federal subsidies for ultra-processed foods and beverages in school lunches

◀ A Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Investigations Subcommittee hearing on the public perception of vaccines and vaccine policy in Washington on Sept. 9, 2025.

5. Remove genetically modified organism ingredients from our food
6. Prohibit direct-to-consumer drug advertising
7. Stop adding fluoride to local drinking water
8. Remove established childhood vaccine recommendations for diseases such as whooping cough, measles, hepatitis, and others

You don’t need to be told that question No. 8 came in dead last, which allows the poll to be interpreted as proving that changing the schedule is politically unpopular.

Let’s just take apart the sentence as it reads: “Remove established childhood vaccine recommendations for diseases like whooping cough, measles, hepatitis and others.”

It’s the longest and most complicated of all. The words are complicated and strung together like linguini.

Note the term “established.” It means settled, done, recognized, practiced, fixed in place. To oppose what is established is to upset the apple cart, and you need to have good reasons for doing so. Also note the use of the term “recommendations” rather than requirements, which is what they are in practice. Who can oppose an established recommendation?

Also note that the recommendations are “diseases like” three terrible things. If there is a way to stop those things using established recommendations, who in his right mind would oppose that?

This is how you build a biased poll, not with obvious language but with little sprinkles that trigger the mind in a certain direction. It’s extremely clever.

Remember that most pollsters work for clients. Their job is to make the person paying the bills happy. This is why it is absolutely essential to look under the hood, so to speak, and examine the questions from the point of view of a normal person. Above all else, don’t let your own views on anything be affected by a poll that may or may not be valid. It could just reflect the bias of the poll’s designers.

Keep your decoder ring on. Surveys and polls have long been used to manipulate the public mind. You don’t want to be among the manipulated.

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.

I do not believe we should intervene every time something is uncomfortable. And yet, I have taken antibiotics. I was once transported to a hospital during childbirth and had to be cut open because a bone that healed poorly from a teenage car accident made natural delivery unsafe. If I had insisted that nature simply take its course, both my son and I could have died. Letting nature take its course would have meant accepting a preventable tragedy.

There are moments when intervention is not arrogance but stewardship.

It is important to clarify what this sterile fly program is and what it is not. There are modern programs in other parts of the world that use genetically engineered insects, including gene-drive mosquitoes and inherited DNA modification, to suppress disease vectors. Those programs intentionally alter genetic material so traits are passed down through generations. This screwworm program is not that. These flies are not genetically modified in the biotech sense. No genes are added. No DNA is spliced. Nothing is engineered to spread. The males are sterilized using controlled radiation, a tool we already use in cancer treatment, medical sterilization, and food safety. The radiation damages reproductive cells so the males cannot produce viable offspring. It does not make them radioactive, and it does not create a new

This is not about cheering for government programs. It is about choosing the least destructive option in front of us.

organism. It simply renders them infertile. Because female screwworms mate only once in their lifetime, that infertility is enough to collapse the population over time.

This is not a one-sided action. The United States has opened a sterile fly dispersal facility in Edinburg, Texas, and is reinforcing the northern buffer zone. A larger domestic production facility, funded at roughly three-quarters of a billion dollars, is underway to increase capacity so we are not solely dependent on production in Panama. Mexico is conducting surveillance, treating cases rapidly, operating trap networks, and coordinating sterile fly releases within its territory. Mexican and U.S. authorities are working together because parasites do not recognize borders. This is a regional containment effort.

I understand the hesitation around federal spending. I share it. But this is not about cheering for government programs. It is about choosing the least destructive option in front of us.

Sometimes stewardship means picking the better bad.

If sterile flies fail, the alternative is not some romantic return to balance. The alternative is chemical escalation. It is heavier insecticides, more aggressive parasiticides, and more widespread treatment protocols that touch soil, water, wildlife, ranchers, and consumers.

It is animals suffering while producers scramble to contain infestations. It is more human exposure, not less.

Screwworm is horrific. But the chemical response to a full reestablishment would be horrific in a different way.

As someone who has built her life around natural systems, I believe the sterile insect technique is the far better bad. It is species-specific. It is temporary. It does not rewrite DNA. It interrupts reproduction and lets biology do the rest.

This is not a situation where we can gain herd immunity and let it burn through. There is no natural immunity that protects against a fly laying eggs in an open wound. Every newborn navel, every branding mark, every fence injury, every surgical incision becomes an opportunity.

The way through is not through. The way through is containment.

Stewardship does not mean intervening in everything. But it also does not mean standing still while something preventable spreads through the animals entrusted to our care and into the food supply we all depend on.

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.”

SPECIAL SERIES: HOW THE SPECTER OF COMMUNISM IS RULING OUR WORLD

The Media: The Specter’s Mouthpiece

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
13

1. Mass Indoctrination in Communist Countries (cont.)

During the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, the CCP claimed that the student demonstrators were violent thugs and used this as justification to deploy the army to suppress the alleged “riot.” Following the massacre, it claimed that the army didn’t shoot anyone and that there were no casualties in the square. [6] In 2001, early on in the persecution of Falun Gong, the regime staged a self-immolation hoax in Tiananmen Square to frame the spiritual practice and kindle hatred toward Falun Gong practitioners across China and around the world. [7]

Leading cadres in committees at all levels of the CCP place great importance on propaganda work and field considerable personnel for this task. By the end of 2010, China had more than 1.3 million staff working in the national propaganda apparatus, including about 56,000 in propaganda departments at the provincial and county levels, 1.2 million in local propaganda units, and 52,000 people in the central propaganda work units. [8] This figure does not include the large number of staff who were responsible for monitoring and manipulating on-line opinion, such as internet police, moderators, Party-controlled commentators, and others employed in various forms of public relations.

Countries ruled by communist parties, without exception, use great amounts of resources to manipulate the media. Years of operation have honed communist state media into efficient mouthpieces for their totalitarian masters. They use any and all means to deceive and poison the minds of the people.

2. Communist Infiltration of Western Media and Hollywood

The last century was witness to great conflicts between the free world and the communist camp. All the while, communism has been successfully infiltrating and subverting the media in Western countries. This chapter focuses on the United States, in light of the extraordinary influence of American media throughout the world.

After the Soviet regime seized power in Russia, it attempted to establish control over public discourse in the West, dispatching its agents to infiltrate Western media and enticing local communist sympathizers. It used these people to great effect in eulogizing the Soviet Union and concealing the brutality of communist rule. Soviet propaganda efforts swayed large numbers of Westerners and even influenced government policy to favor the Soviet Union.

The Soviet KGB used its agents in the United States to work directly with prestigious American media organizations. Among these agents were John Scott, Richard Lauterbach, and Stephen Laird of Time magazine, who used their positions to mingle with politicians, celebrities, and heads of state. Aside from gathering a wide range of intelligence, they also influenced high-level decisions concerning matters of politics, economics, diplomacy, war, and more. Another Time editor and Soviet spy, Whitaker Chambers, later defected and wrote the book “Witness” detailing communist subversion in the United States. [9]

Walter Duranty, the Moscow correspondent for The New York Times, won the 1932 Pulitzer Prize for a series of articles on the Soviet Union. Former American communist Jay Lovestone and prominent journalist Joseph Alsop both believe Duranty acted as a Soviet agent. [10] During the 1932–1933 famine that ravaged Ukraine and other regions of the Soviet Union, Duranty denied that the famine even existed,



▲ A local television reporter at Tiananmen Square prior to the closing of a political session at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on March 12, 2013.

Years of operation have honed communist state media into efficient mouthpieces for their totalitarian masters. They use any and all means to deceive and poison the minds of the people.

let alone that millions of people were starving to death. He claimed that “any report of a famine in Russia is today an exaggeration or malignant propaganda.” [11] Describing the consequences of Duranty’s false reporting, Robert Conquest, a famous British historian and authoritative scholar on the history of the Soviet Union, wrote in his book “The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine”: “As one of the best known correspondents in the world for one of the best known newspapers in the world, Mr. Duranty’s denial that there was a famine was accepted as gospel. Thus Mr. Duranty gulled not only the readers of The New York Times but because of the newspaper’s prestige, he influenced the thinking of countless thousands of other readers about the character of Josef Stalin and the Soviet regime. And he certainly influenced the newly-elected President [Franklin D.] Roosevelt to recognize the Soviet Union.” [12]

At the same time, Hollywood was infiltrated by communist and leftist ideas. Willi Münzenberg, a German communist and member of the Third International, traveled to the United States and recognized that the American film industry could be used as a tool for propaganda, implementing Lenin’s concepts of film development and production. He sent his trusted assistant Otto Katz and his associate Louis Gibarti to infiltrate the industry. Katz was highly successful in penetrating the social circles of the Hollywood elite and soon established a Communist Party branch organization, the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League.

Step by step, the Soviet Union’s influence began to set in. Many filmmakers of the era idolized the Soviets, and these sentiments only grew during World War II, when the United States and the Soviet Union were briefly allied against Nazi Germany. A famous playwright claimed that the German invasion of the Soviet Union was “an attack on our motherland.” [13] A line in “Mission to Moscow,” a 1943 film intended to bolster support for the Soviet-American alliance, portrays the Soviet Union as being a country founded on the same fundamental principles as those of the United States. [14]

The Chinese communist regime also has greatly benefited from leftist media and journalists in the free world. Prominent among them were left-wing

American journalists Edgar Snow, Agnes Smedley, and Anna Louise Strong. Snow’s book “Red Star Over China” painted a glowing picture of Mao and other senior Chinese Communist Party leaders while hiding their crimes and the evil nature of communism from Western readers. Mao said, “Snow is the first person to clear the road for the friendly relations needed to establish a united front.” [15] Smedley wrote many articles and books flattering the CCP and its leadership. There is strong evidence from the Soviet archives suggesting that she was a Comintern agent who worked to foster armed revolution in India and collect intelligence for the Soviets. [16] Strong also was an admirer of the Chinese communist movement. The CCP has acknowledged these three Americans by issuing postage stamps in honor of their “meritorious service.”

Notes

6. Han Mei 韩梅, “Ying jiemi dang’an baoguang ‘liu si’ siwang renshu: shiti duiji zai dixiatongdao 英解密档案曝光 “六四” 死亡人数: 尸体堆积在地下通道 [“UK Declassifies Files on Casualties at Tiananmen; Bodies Stored Underground in Heaps”], Sound of Hope Radio, Dec. 20, 2017. [In Chinese]
7. “Self-Immolation Hoax on Tiananmen Square,” Minghui, en.minghui.org/cc/88.
8. “Zongshu: Chuangxinjizhi qianghua peiyang – goujian gaosuzhi xuanchuanwenhuauiwu” 综述: 创新机制强化培养 构建高素质宣传文化队伍 [“General Overview: Intensify the Fostering of a Mechanism for Innovation, Construct a High-Grade Propaganda Cultural Team”], Xinhua News Network, Sept. 28, 2011. [In Chinese]
9. Matthew Vadum, “Journalistic Treachery,” Canada Free Press, July 1, 2015.
10. Marco Carynnyk, “The New York Times and the Great Famine,” Ukrainian Weekly, vol. LI, no. 37, published Sept. 11, 1983.
11. Walter Duranty, as quoted in Robert Conquest, “The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine” (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 319.
12. Robert Conquest, as quoted in Arnold Beichman, “Pulitzer-Winning Lies,” The Weekly Standard, June 12, 2003.
13. Ronald Radosh and Allis Radosh, “Red Star Over Hollywood: The Film Colony’s Long Romance With the Left” (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2005), 80.
14. Ibid., 105.
15. Mao Zedong, as quoted in Edgar Snow, “Random Notes on Red China, 1936–1945” (Montana: Literary Licensing, LLC, 2011).
16. Ruth Price, “The Lives of Agnes Smedley” (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 5–9.

See next edition for the next installment.



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▶ British-born journalist Walter Duranty, the Moscow correspondent for the New York Times, reads a copy of Pravda, circa 1925.



How Government Shutdowns Erode Public Trust and National Stability

By Christian Milord



Last fall, Americans endured a six-week federal government shutdown. Members of both major parties were at loggerheads over hot-button issues such as health care and immigration, and both dug in their heels rather than reach a compromise. Thus, brinkmanship ensued, leading to the shutdown.

Essential services such as the armed forces and law enforcement maintained operations, but employees didn't get paid, which hurt their families. The transportation grid, especially air travel and some shipping, almost ground to a halt, causing frustration for the public. It generated instability and a degree of economic negatives in the distribution of the crucial supply chain.

Fast forward to this February, and another partial shutdown is underway. Congress members once again failed to reach a consensus on issues related to immigration funding and Department of Homeland Security activities. However, the department is already funded for the current fiscal year, so it is puzzling why a shutdown would produce a positive outcome. Or is it merely a political stunt in an attempt to score points?

Some might argue that these shutdowns can be helpful, since legislation is stalled, meaning more regulations and taxes would be put on the back burner. Spending slows as gridlock sets in, and this could be an appropriate time to brainstorm downsizing government ideas, with reduced debt and deficit spending akin to the

Department of Government Efficiency. Visualize for a moment if a shutdown were initiated at the city, county, or state level of government. What might unfold? If "non-essential" employees aren't on the job, it would be difficult to collect revenue and disburse services in a timely manner. Normal services such as trash collection and street sweeping likely would be delayed or disrupted. Tax-funded clinics and schools would likely continue operating, while public safety personnel such as fire crews and police departments would operate without pay. However, public safety response times could be adversely affected.

One aspect to bear in mind regarding government shutdowns is that our global adversaries are highly likely to be aware of social disruptions in other nations.

This lack of predictable continuity and stability can harm not only employees but also the general public, and it can erode public trust in governing institutions. Remember that governing entities contract out many of their services to the private sector, and those services could slow down. Likewise, if tax-funded institutions are affected by unionized strikes, the delivery of a range of services can be impeded. Strikes or walkouts usually

occur when employees fight for better benefits, wages, and working conditions. If a shutdown or strike continues for weeks, it can be highly disruptive to government operations and to the folks who depend on social services. It can also hamper the ability of contracted services to carry out routine operations because fewer government personnel are carrying out the duties usually assigned to a larger workforce.

Not all employees are in favor of shutdowns or strikes. Like most folks, they prefer to maintain a routine of productivity and purpose in their lives and dislike uncertainty. During my college years, I was involved with copper and zinc mining in northern Manitoba during the summers. Union mine workers (United Mine Workers) were involved in a strike with the large mining company. I didn't enjoy sitting around doing little, so I foolishly stood up in a meeting and declared that I wanted to go back to work. That was a dangerous thing to say, and I was fortunate to go unscathed after the meeting!

Government shutdowns or strikes by unionized government workers are often controversial, with plenty of arguments on both sides of contention. Some might be justified if workers are treated with disrespect and human dignity is under siege. However, in most scenarios, no side gets everything that it reasonably demands or requests.

Our Adversaries Are Watching
One aspect to bear in mind regarding government shutdowns is that our global

adversaries are highly likely to be aware of social disruptions in other nations. Despite the fact that these countries have plenty of internal challenges, they can chew gum and walk at the same time. Authoritarian and autocratic leaders have nearly full control over their own citizens, and they exploit any signs of weakness emanating from democratic societies.

They can view a shutdown in the United States as an opportunity to disseminate disinformation regarding the West or even attempt a cyberattack against what they might view as a soft target. That is why it is critical to harden the grids for digital platforms, energy, food supply, national security, and water systems to deter disruptive cyber intrusions during a crisis event or government shutdown.

What can be done to prevent or mitigate the impact of government shutdowns? Good-faith negotiations by all concerned parties should be a starting point so that a horse-trading consensus can emerge to resolve specific issues. Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good. Before a potential shutdown, political leaders should reflect on the repercussions it could generate against the constituents they are supposed to protect and serve. Does any side truly win when a government shutdown is implemented?

Christian Milord, MS, is an educator, mentor, USCG veteran, and writer based in Orange County, Calif. His topics of interest include culture, economics, education, domestic policy, foreign policy, and military issues.

Comics

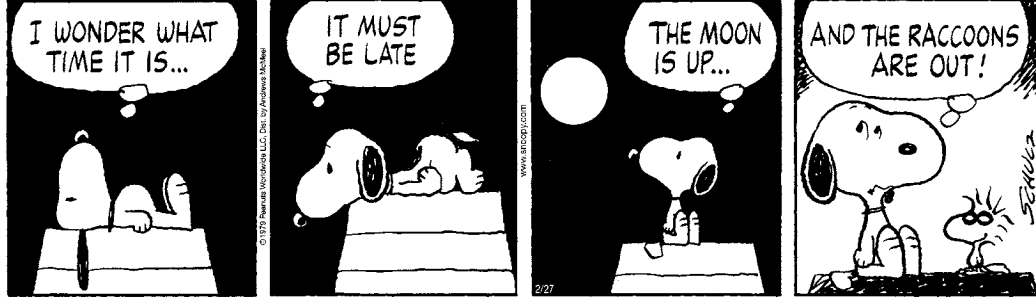
TANK MCNAMARA



GARFIELD



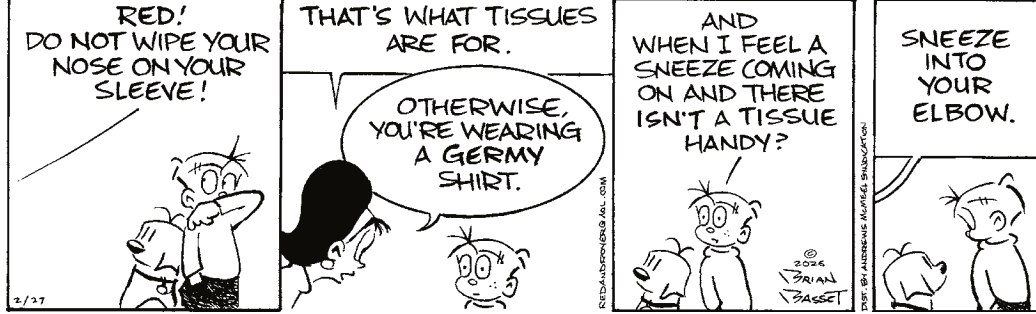
PEANUTS



BABY BLUES



RED AND ROVER



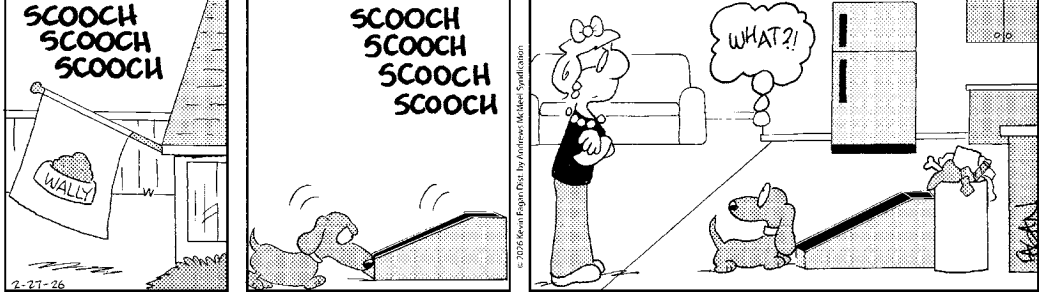
BIG NATE



GRAND AVENUE



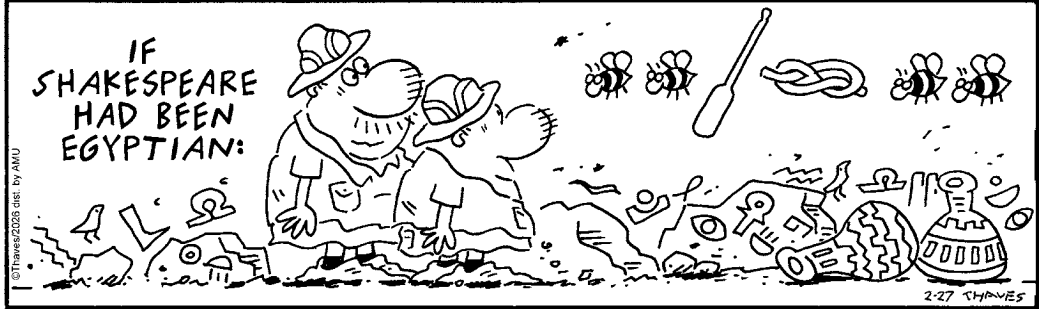
DRABBLE



MUTT & JEFF

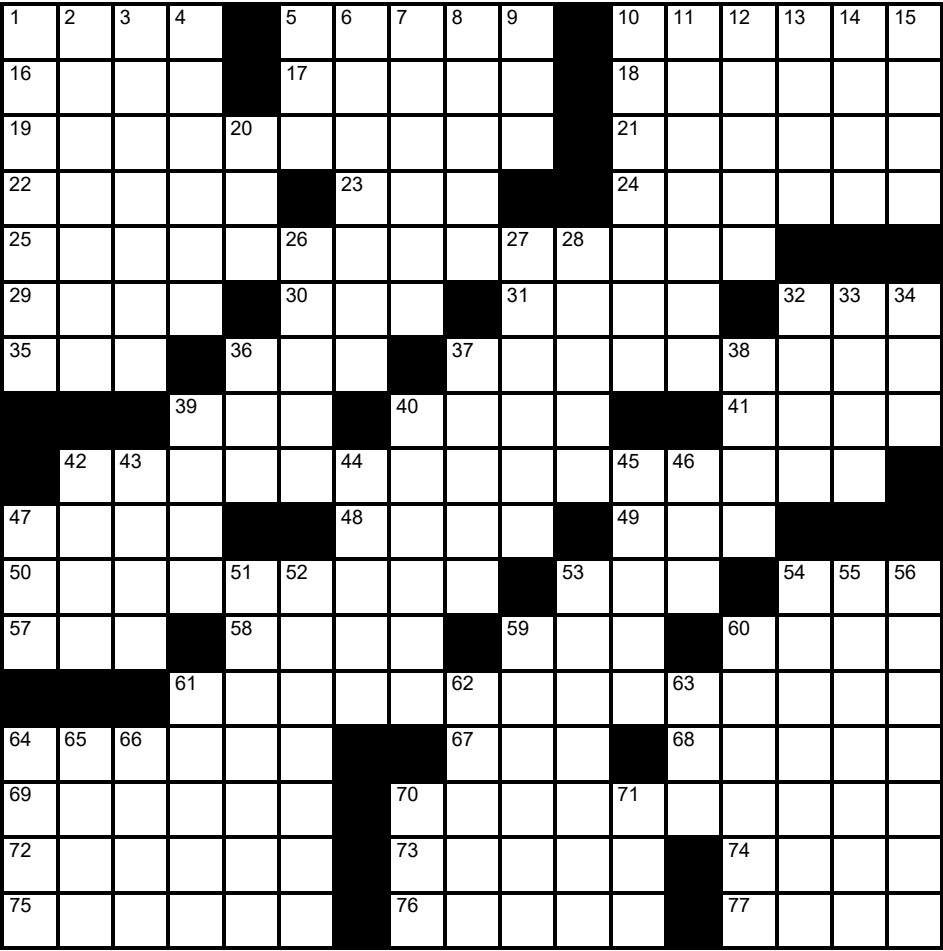


FRANK AND ERNEST



CROSSWORD

CONSTRUCTED BY TOM HOUSTON
EPOCH TIMES STAFF



- Across**
- 1. “The ___ of Venice.”
 - 5. Feet, according to Ovid
 - 10. Shipworm
 - 16. Apropos of
 - 17. French Formula One driver Jean
 - 18. Made elliptical
 - 19. Law enforcement may set one up
 - 21. Bakery chain whose name means “breadbasket”
 - 22. Bristles
 - 23. Toupee, slangily
 - 24. Model airplane builders
 - 25. Reject emphatically
 - 29. Estrada of “CHiPs”
 - 30. Halloween’s mo.
 - 31. Indian bread
 - 32. Son of Noah
 - 35. Curse
 - 36. “Gloria in excelsis ___”
 - 37. “Mary Poppins” author
 - 39. Solo in space
 - 40. ___ bean
 - 41. Big story
 - 42. Make a more attractive offer
 - 47. Alpha Delta Pi or Alpha Gamma Delta, for short
 - 48. Feudal estate
 - 49. Golden Globe Perlman
 - 50. 100+ products at shopdisney.com
 - 53. Unnerve
 - 54. Know, old style
 - 57. Records that may be broken
 - 58. Pertaining to a mil. division
 - 59. Overhead light?
 - 60. Leeds’s river
 - 61. Car buyer’s concern
 - 64. “True Blue” Canadian brewer
 - 67. Pulls
 - 68. ___ vivendi
 - 69. Curved high-back bench
 - 70. “Let’s shake on it”

- 72. Term of affection
- 73. ___ flu
- 74. Acts as the interlocutor
- 75. Bratislava native
- 76. Efforts
- 77. Galley notation

- Down**
- 1. Error
 - 2. Money worth about \$1.20 in Barcelona
 - 3. Eloquent woman
 - 4. Adjust after an upset loss, say
 - 5. “Fiddlesticks!”
 - 6. “View of Toledo” artist
 - 7. Scrape off metal
 - 8. A modern assent
 - 9. Half-brother of Tom Sawyer
 - 10. Popular BBC show
 - 11. 1987 Isabel Allende novel
 - 12. Incurred

CHESS CHALLENGE

BY MICHAEL GIBBS

Lasker – Capablanca (1935), White to move, White’s pieces are on active squares, Black has a bad bishop, misplaced queen and if the black square bishops are traded a serious king side weakness, with this knowledge would you have been able to beat Capablanca?



WORK SPACE

4NUMBERS

CONSTRUCTED BY C. CHANG
AT 4NUMS.COM

Use the four numbers in the corners, and the operators (+, −, x, and /) 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

1924

51

1220

+−×÷

Hard 1 - 1 Solution

910

62

710

+−×÷

Easy 1 - 1 Solution

DAILY BRIDGE CLUB

WHAT HE DIDN'T DO

BY FRANK STEWART, TRIBUNE CONTENT AGENCY
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In my high school yearbook, everybody had an apt quotation next to his picture. One member of my class who was always in some sort of trouble chose this: “It’s not what you do, it’s what you get caught doing.”

Against today’s four spades, West led a heart in response to East’s opening bid. East took the K-A and shifted to the ten of diamonds: jack, queen, king. Declarer next led dummy’s jack of trumps, but when East played low, declarer took the king and ace. He lost to East’s queen of trumps and ace of clubs. Down one.

INFERENCE

I don’t know what became of my trouble-prone classmate; I suspect he went into politics. But South makes his game if he draws an inference.

It’s not what East did, it’s what he didn’t do. If East had only low trumps, he could lose nothing by leading another heart at Trick Three, letting West score the queen of trumps (if he had it) by ruffing in front of dummy. Since East led a diamond instead, South could infer that East had the queen of trumps.

DAILY QUESTION

You hold: ♠ Q 5 2 ♥ A K 10 9 8 ♦ 10 5 ♣ A J 3. You open one heart, and your partner bids one spade. What do you say?

ANSWER: A rebid of two hearts is possible but would suggest a six-card or longer suit. A bid of 1NT would be reasonably descriptive but is unappealing with weak diamonds. Your best call – I am convinced of this – is a raise to two spades. Auctions are facilitated when a trump suit is suggested early.

East dealer
Both sides vulnerable

NORTH

♠ J 10 6 4
♥ J 5
♦ A K 4 2
♣ A K Q 6

WEST

♠ 7
♥ 4 3
♦ Q 9 8 7 3
♣ 8 7 5 4 2

EAST

♠ Q 5 2
♥ A K 10 9 8
♦ 10 5
♣ A J 3

SOUTH

♠ A K 9 8 3
♥ Q 7 6 2
♦ J 6
♣ 10 9

East

1 ♥
Pass
Pass
All Pass

South

Pass
1 ♠
3 ♠

West

Pass
Pass
Pass

North

Dbl
2 ♠
4 ♠

Opening lead – ♥ 4

WORDSEARCH

CONSTRUCTED BY TOM HOUSTON
EPOCH TIMES STAFF

HELP WITH TODAY’S CROSSWORD PUZZLE?

E R I T R E A N W D S L O V A K P
E O F A G E C K R E R A N K L U Y
L T E R E D O U A R M G L U E R S
T S A T A N M R R U I B M S S S Y
A M I S S T E P A S L C O S I E P
N E C E I N D S E T E N S W S N L
K X D D A A O S K L S A E I M T T
E E O P N P W E E E P L T R O I R
P D R Q L U N M N A E V A L U N A
O R O D R T I O M D R Q E S S O V
N A U M A E N D W I G C I A E R E
E L R A N R P U I N A U H S E A R
E A K D U T R S L T L O E G A T S
U B E T P H I H D S L N M P R R A
R A E V W E C G E A O P I U S I P
O T N W E R E N S P N W D J E X D
E T O P G E A R T W E L G R E C O

ALES
ALOHAS
ASIAN
COME DOWN IN
PRICE
CURSE AT
DERUST
DINTS
EEL TANK
EL GRECO
ERITREA
ESIGN

EVA LUNA
EXEDRA
GLUERS
LABATT
MAD TV
MILES PER GAL-
LON
MISSTEP
MODUS
MOUSE EARS
NO END
OF AGE

ONE EURO
ORATRIX
O'ROURKE
P.L. TRAVERS
PANERA
PEDES
PIUSI
PONES
PUT 'ER THERE
RAN UP
RERANK
SATAN

SEARCH GRID
SENT IN
SETAE
SLOVAK
SWIRLS
TEREDO
TOP GEAR
TURN ONE'S
NOSE UP
WILDEST

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

24 + 20 + 19 - 12
Hard 1

9 × 7 - 7 - 10/10
Easy 1

CHESS CHALLENGE

- 1. h4
- 2. h5
- 3. Bxg7
- 4. Re5
- 5. Rd6!
- 6. Qc1
- 7. Rf6!
- 8. Rh3
- 9. Qh6+
- 10. hxe6
- 11. Bxg6
- 12. Rg5
- 13. Rf3
- 14. gxf3



I tell all of my friends about this paper hoping that they would read it. ... Keep up the good work. You will be number one soon.

CHERYL EDMISTON, PA



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CALIFORNIA THEME PARK

Children's Fairyland connects to children through its storybook approach. **B4**

Travel

THE EPOCH TIMES

B1 FRIDAY, FEB. 27, 2026



ALLEN J. SCHABEN/LOS ANGELES TIMES/TNS

ELEPHANT VALLEY

San Diego Zoo Safari Park brings visitors closer to its elephants. **B6**



CAVAN IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

AIR TRAVEL

The Biology of Crossing Time Zones

Jet lag reminds us that the human body keeps its own time, regardless of the clock in the airport

By Eric Lucas

Jet lag is an ugly thing. Jet lag is for weaklings. As with most of the human condition, reality is found between these two extremes. You fly through 10 time zones and land in Timbuktu only to become a dazed halfwit who sleeps all day and prowls restlessly through the night. Or you speed merrily around the world, touch ground with an adventurous spring in your step, and glide out vigorously into our glorious, interesting planet. “I never have jet lag,” a brazen young software sales exec told me once at an aviation industry conference. “Ever. Fly a million miles a year, have clients in 27 countries, been in every time zone ... no jet lag.” He didn’t actually live anywhere, he explained rather vaingloriously. Kept a few belongings in his parents’ garage in Florida. Post office box in New Jersey. Two hundred flights per year, 220 hotel rooms. Bank accounts in Singapore, Zurich, and New York City ... you get the picture. He was a presenter. He’d been in London six hours, inbound from Dubai, United Arab Emirates, and was admirably lucid. I had arrived in London the morning before, met a client for lunch, checked into a hotel, and went to sleep at 6 p.m. Yuck—wide awake at 2 a.m. I “worked” until breakfast, then trundled myself and my bag three miles on foot across London so I could stay awake. I listened to a panel discussion on global distribution systems (this did not help the staying awake problem), had a quick dinner with another client, and collapsed in bed at 7:30 p.m. ... only to wake pitifully

at 3 a.m., which was 7 p.m. back home. My jet-lag-proof acquaintance sprinted back to Heathrow Airport, hopped on a plane to Shanghai, and signed a contract for a \$3 million software installation the next day. Supposedly. Meanwhile, I finally adjusted two days later and saw an awesome production of “Macbeth” at the National Theatre ... only to go through the same weary process on my trip home after a week in the UK. What’s going on? The human body wasn’t designed by nature for us to hop across the planet like frogs. Our circadian rhythms are powerful, and we’re lucky they are—it’s how we make physiological and psychological sense

The human body wasn’t designed by nature for us to hop across the planet like frogs.

of Earth’s rotation. Cross multiple time zones quickly, and the result is sleep disturbance, fatigue, confusion, crankiness, and more. No human faced jet lag until the dawn of the jet age ... at which time jet lag not only sprang into existence, but also entered medical jargon: circadian rhythm sleep disorder. It’s disorderly, all right. If you’re awake, read on. **Go West, Young Traveler** It’s easier flying west than east. Most observers figure that this is because your psyche/metabolism can adapt to a long day better than to a missing day. *Continued on B2*



IZUSEK/GETTY IMAGES

◀ When going eastbound, try to sleep as much as you can.



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AIR TRAVEL

The Biology of Crossing Time Zones

Going westbound, try to stay awake as much as possible; going eastbound, get as much shut-eye as you can

Continued from B1

You can’t force yourself to fall asleep, but you can fight to stay awake. In my experience, this is true. But there is still a pretty big problem.

You can’t always fly west.

Well, you can, technically, if you want to cross Earth’s biggest ocean—and the international date line to boot. So, instead of 10 hours to Paris, it’s 25 hours, not to mention the addition of an entire calendar day when you cross the date line.

Heaven help transpacific travelers heading east: Not only do you surrender 10 hours to the ether, but also, crossing the date line means that you may arrive back in the United States before you left Asia. Zounds! Your body is confused. Your intellect is brutalized: Take off from Tokyo early Wednesday, arrive in San Francisco late on Tuesday.

Here Comes the Sun

Our complex physiologies mostly measure time by daylight. Makes sense: Humankind evolved on this sunlit planet. So exposure to daylight is often

reckoned a key factor in jet lag or lack of the same. That’s the good news.

Bad news is, the actual parameters of this can be as complex as quantum mechanics. When you arrive in X, experts advise, expose yourself to daylight in the late morning (not dawn or late afternoon) for Y minutes. If you are in Z, the advice is different. North Pole, different still. Read all about it at the Mayo Clinic website’s entry on jet lag. If you grasp it all, please write to me and explain.

Experienced global travelers often advise: If it’s light out, stay awake; if it’s dark, sleep. This simple axiom has many speed bumps, such as traveling to the far north in midsummer (Norway, say), and offers no answer to the sleep problems that underlie the whole syndrome.

It Gets Tougher as You Age

Sorry, this is the truth of it. Thirty years ago, at the start of my global gallivanting, it was fairly easy to recover on first arriving in Vienna, say: Stay awake as long as possible, then go to bed and sleep through the night. I once slept 14 hours straight, which is a lifetime record for me. I have little hope of doing that anymore.

THOMAS BARWICK/GETTY IMAGES



▲ Once you arrive at your destination, staying active as long as there's daylight helps mitigate the symptoms of jetlag.

BERNARDBODO/GETTY IMAGES



Sleeping on Long-Haul Flights Is Sketchy at Best

If you're in coach, the human body is not designed to sleep sitting up. Even if you have a lie-flat seat, distractions abound: people talking, kids squalling, pilot announcements, dishes clanking, toilets flushing, and turbulence.

And these days the intercontinental in-flight entertainment is wickedly alluring. Free streaming! All you want!

Experienced global travelers often advise: If it's light out, stay awake; if it's dark, sleep.

ALONA SINIEHINA/GETTY IMAGES



▲ **Pharmaceuticals or alcohol might seem like quick solutions, but they often provide limited relief and can carry side effects.**

Stuff you'll never see at home. I once binged an entire season of "Game of Thrones" on an 11-hour flight from London to Los Angeles.

Just try your best. Watch one (just one! I mean it) movie while you're having dinner, then lie back and snooze however much you can. If you arrive the next day truly rested, thank your lucky stars.

Drugs Are a Poor Answer

Whether on the plane or once you've arrived, pharmaceutical assistance is dancing with the devil. Even melatonin, the supposedly "mild" and "natural" supplement, is marginally effective and has side effects that include, yay, confusion. The very sensible Mayo Clinic website doesn't rule it out but urges small doses. My experience bears this out.

Stronger sleep medications are downright dangerous. The best-known have been linked to car crashes, brutal withdrawal, and more. I may suffer the consequences of jet lag, but poisoning my body is even worse.

Alcohol causes nothing but trouble all around.

So What's a Body to Do?

Try to sleep as much as you can eastbound (and pull every string you can to get in business class). Then stay awake as long as you can during the new day in your destination—go for a walk, visit a museum, or go out to dinner. Then go to bed as close to your regular time as possible. In other words, pretend that you're transiting a shorter but otherwise ordinary day. You're fooling your circadian rhythms, but it's a worthy scam.

Westbound, it's the opposite: Stay awake on the flight as much as possible;

that's what all that free in-flight entertainment is good for, even if it does rot your brain. When you arrive back home, have dinner and go to bed as near to your regular time as you can.

In both directions, when sleep overwhelms you, resist but not to extremes: Sleep is crucial to overall well-being. If you do wake up, lie quietly (this doesn't mean grabbing your device for a supposedly short session of Candy Crush Saga) and call on whatever still-mind practices you have. If that fails, pursue some moderate beneficial activity for a while. My very enterprising and practical wife, Nicole, once led me on a lovely walk along the shores of Lake Geneva at 2 a.m. ... after which we slept until breakfast.

Are There Wackier Ideas?

Some frequent travelers urge you to adjust your food cycle ... the No. 2 circadian rhythm, supposedly. Figure out when breakfast is at your destination, have a big meal on the plane at that time, and away you go. Fast for at least 16 hours beforehand. I don't plan to try this out.

Some suggest no sleeping on planes at all, ever. I doubt whether they've been on a 16-hour flight to Dubai.

"Just act like a man and deal with it!" a supposed travel expert wrote on Reddit. No comment needed.

Whether you are felled by jet lag or resistant to it, please be kind and patient with yourself and those around you. I cannot be like that young global software salesman, and I'm fine with that. I believe that karma awaits those who look down on jet lag sufferers.

The bottom line is, there's no magic way around it. Remember, this is the price we pay for the precious gift of exploring our planet and our civilizations.

Let me leave you with Albert Einstein's famous aphorism: "The only reason for time to exist is so everything doesn't happen at once."

He was baffled by time, so it's no surprise we are.

Eric Lucas is a retired associate editor at Alaska Beyond Magazine and lives on a small farm on a remote island north of Seattle, where he grows organic hay, beans, apples, and squash.

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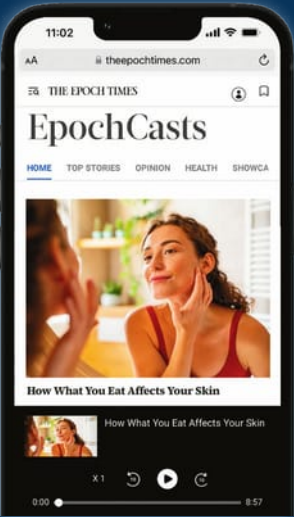
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THE EPOCH TIMES

THEME PARKS

The Storybook Park That Inspired Disneyland

More than 75 years after it opened, Children’s Fairyland continues to offer immersive storytelling to visitors of all ages

By Todd Martens

Since the beginning, guests at Children’s Fairyland have been welcomed by a sculpture inspired by the nursery rhyme “There Was an Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe,” now a pink, oversized ankle boot with a crooked roof and eye-popping, candy-like buttons. Today, the shoe is raised on a concrete, plant-adorned platform, but it originally sat flat on the ground, forcing grown-ups to duck to enter the park.

That was more than just a quirk of design. It was a mission statement.

The 10-acre garden wonderland, nestled around Oakland’s urban sanctuary of Lake Merritt, has maintained one core rule since it opened its gates on Sept. 2, 1950: “No child without an adult, and no adult without a child.” For Fairyland aims to show the world through the eyes of a young’un—a place filled with curiosity, but also perhaps a bit off-kilter, where one can walk into a whale and find a fishbowl, slide down a dragon, and get lost in an “Alice in Wonderland” maze of cards.

And yet, for more than 75 years now, Fairyland has had a grown-up sized influence. Fairyland is considered the first “storybook”-style park in the country, launching a national fad. Legend has it that Walt Disney visited Fairyland while Disneyland was in the planning stages and was so taken with it that he poached some staff. Fairyland’s “magic keys,” which unlock audio tales throughout the park, were an innovation felt across numerous industries. And the park has been instrumental in the puppet space, home to what’s said to be the oldest ongoing puppet-focused theater in the country. Those at L.A.’s own long-running Bob Baker Marionette Theater today cite Fairyland as an inspiration.

It is Fairyland’s thesis that continues to feel revolutionary. And that’s a belief that the way to understand, learn, and grow is via the stories we tell one another, and those narratives need no fancy tech or digital accouterments.

“Families want simplicity,” says Kymberly Miller, Fairyland’s CEO. “They want to come in and be like, ‘I feel really safe here.’ It’s a contained space. It’s big but it’s small. Kids can run around and make up things to do with the canvas of Fairyland.”

To enter Fairyland, and it’s estimated that about 150,000 people do each year, is to not just set foot into a handcrafted fantasyland but to also step back in time. It persists at a time theme parks have increasingly targeted a young market with a host of upscale tricks. Legoland, for instance, will this March open a new land in Lego Galaxy with a family roller coaster as its signature attraction. Also this year, the Universal Kids Resort is slated to open in Frisco, Texas. It’s a smaller Universal Studios geared toward a younger audience but featuring cinematic brands such as “Shrek” and “Jurassic World.”

The nonprofit Fairyland is downright quaint in comparison—tickets are under



▲ Visitors board a boat with a disco ball inside as they attend the Fairy Winterland event at Children’s Fairyland on Dec. 30, 2021.

The park’s sets and sculptures are repainted regularly to keep the colors vibrant for visitors. ▼



LSOPHOTO/SHUTTERSTOCK

\$20, with steeper discounts for Oakland residents. Surviving societal, technological, and bureaucratic shifts, it’s become the little park that could, its durability a statement of defiance in our fast-paced, divisive world.

And its story begins once upon a time.

Children’s Fairyland was the vision of Arthur Navlet, a retired owner of Oakland’s largest nursery. On a visit to the Belle Isle Aquarium in Detroit, Navlet and his wife were smitten by the park’s children zoo, which, as detailed in the book “Creating a Fairyland” by Randal J. Metz, a former Fairyland art director who currently leads the park’s puppet program, exhibited the animals amid fairy tale-like enclosures. Navlet had an idea for a fanciful park in Oakland, and took the concept to the Lake Merritt Breakfast Club, a long-standing civic-focused group dedicated to preserving and sustaining Lakeside Park.

With the organization, and soon the city, behind him, Navlet tapped painter and sculptor William Russell Everitt to create the Fairyland look. It wasn’t always a smooth partnership. Everitt, for instance, created a model of an English cottage that Navlet thought was a bit too realistic. Everitt, writes Metz, took a baseball bat to the tiny sculpture and stormed out of the room. But he didn’t quit the project, and future designs were full of oblong shapes, zig-zagging roofs and slanted walls, designs that were playful but also a nonsensical view of reality.

And thus the Fairyland-style was established. Copy-cats soon followed around the country. In California alone, Fairyland helped inspire the likes of Fairytale Town in Sacramento and Fresno’s Storyland. Fairyland, meanwhile, kept innovating.

“They started adding puppetry and magic and all these things kids absolutely loved,” says Metz. “That started here at Fairyland. There was no other place that was doing that at the moment. After Fairyland opened in 1950, Life magazine did a big full-color spread, and then all over the United States people wanted to build Fairylands.”

While Fairyland started a national trend, perhaps the most famous person to visit the park was Disney, who, says Metz, arrived at Fairyland on Easter Sunday in 1954, a year before Disneyland opened in July 1955. While the Walt Disney Family Museum and other Disney historians say there is no official record of Disney visiting the park, local newspapers of the era documented his appearance and many, including Metz, take it as fact that Disney spent an afternoon at Fairyland.

Metz writes in his book that Disney was particularly taken with Fairyland’s mini post office, which allowed children to send letters straight from the park. Disneyland to this day has mailboxes in the park. Many draw a comparison to

Fairyland’s Willie the Whale and Disneyland’s Monstro at the start of the Storybook Land Canal Boats, as both aim to swallow guests. The parks also share a love of garden-strewn pathways and an emphasis on breaking up environments with trees, mixing fantasy and nature to create a calming, safe-feeling environment. And Disney, of course, hired Fairyland’s director Dorothy Manes to work on Disneyland.

“She was one of the few women in administrative leadership,” says Cindy Mediavilla, a retired lecturer from UCLA’s department of information studies and author of the book, “The Women Who Made Early Disneyland.”

To Mediavilla, she is an overlooked Disneyland personality, working to set up tour school groups, help define children’s activities and be an advocate for Disneyland’s overly congenial hospitality. “She was credited with coming up with response to people who come up and say, ‘We love Disneyland. Thank you so much,’” says Mediavilla. “She was credited with coming up with the phrase, ‘It’s been my pleasure.’”

She also helped maintain Disney’s direct line to Fairyland, as Disney in 1957 would once again poach from Fairyland, this time puppeteer Bob Mills to run Disneyland’s budding marionette program. Fairyland’s importance in the area of the puppet arts would be hard to overstate. Celebrities in the space, such as Frank Oz, apprenticed at Fairyland, and Metz continues to run multiple shows per day, both revivals and original creations.

Metz’s workshop is directly behind Fairyland’s puppet stage, and it’s a mini marionette museum, filled with books, pictures and, of course, puppets. Behind his desk hangs a Pinocchio puppet he made for the Walt Disney Co., and retired puppets from Highland Park’s Bob Baker Marionette Theater can also be found in Metz’s nook. It’s a treasure trove, as intermixed with Fairyland’s puppets will be those from Walt Disney World’s Epcot, such as a fiery red Pantalone from the theme park’s Italy pavilion.

“Children’s Fairyland, for a lot of puppet theaters, including Bob Baker Marionette Theater, is really the one that we look to,” says Winona Bechtle, Bob Baker’s director of partnerships.

“How do you build out a space and experience around a puppet show?” Bechtle continues. “Of course, they’re different than us, as they have the infrastructure of the amusement park around them, but it’s a full-scale immersive experience that takes you beyond a small stage in a church or a community theater. When you’re at Fairyland, there’s a pomp and circumstance to entering the park, approaching the theater and taking a seat. Us, as puppeteers at Bob Baker Marionette Theater, continue to remain inspired by it.”

Not all of Fairyland’s innovations stuck. In its early days, the park hoped to establish a “pet lending library,” and briefly advertised that guests could borrow rats, guinea pigs, lizards, snakes, foxes, and more for a two-week period. It’s safe to say it didn’t get off the ground, although Fairyland today does house donkeys, goats, chickens, and bearded dragons, among other animals, for children to meet.

And yet Fairyland’s magic keys, introduced in 1958, would inspire not just other parks but museums and zoos around the country. The conceit sounds simple today: Kids are given a small plastic key, for which they insert in a box near an installation and then are regaled with music and a short nurs-

ery rhyme or folktale. It was the brain-child of Bay Area television host Bruce Sedley, who also fashioned himself as an amateur inventor.

“That’s the icon of Fairyland,” says artist Jeff Hull, an Oakland native who once acted at Fairyland as a child performer and has created numerous immersive art projects, including “The Cortège” last fall in L.A.

“You put the magic key in these boxes that look like storybooks and now you’re hearing an audio track that corresponds to an installation? That in itself is immersive art,” says Hull. “That’s storytelling. That’s an installation as performance. That’s the recipe for what so many people have continued to do and expand on.”

To now walk among Fairyland is to feel as if an arm is being extended, an invitation to play, to be silly and to wonder. Children’s Fairyland is full of hand-painted delights. Stroll a path and look down and spy some smiling sunflowers hidden in the bushes. There are fun house mirrors, a whimsical train, a mechanical Geppetto waving in a workshop, and a cat ready to set sail atop the mast of a ship.

There’s even a mini chapel—yes, a chapel—complete with stained glass windows initially designed by children, for those who need a meditative break from running the grounds. A vintage Ferris wheel, themed to “Anansi’s Magic Web,” is an opportunity to rediscover the folktale via the attraction’s netting-like design.

To enter Fairyland, and it’s estimated that about 150,000 people do each year, is to not just set foot into a handcrafted fantasyland but to also step back in time.

Maintenance is a large expense for the park, as most sets need to be repainted yearly due to a combination of environmental and hands-on wear, but the park is also vibrant and in conversation with nature. The striking red-and-bronze sculpture of the smiling Ching Lung the Happy Dragon, for instance, circles around and through a towering tree.

“We believe very strongly in ‘kiddie tech,’” says Metz. “We wanted everything to be hands-on. When children are excited about a set at Fairyland, we try to let them imagine they are in it. Henceforth Alice in Wonderland’s tunnel, and going through the cards and pretending you’re one of Alice’s people.”

Carissa Baker, a Los Angeles native who is now an assistant professor of theme park and attraction management at the University of Central Florida, says that Fairyland created its own stamp on children’s architecture and fairy-tale imagery. “Now, we look at the elaborate spaces of theme parks, and we have all these elaborate forms of fantasy environments,” Baker says. “But I kind of see the seed of these fantasy environments in a place like Children’s Fairyland.”

Miller has been overseeing Fairyland for about five years, and she talks of setting the tone for the park’s next seven decades. First, she’s been working on expanding the park’s access. Those, for instance, who receive any sort of financial assistance can visit the park for \$5 per person, a program started in 2023 that now serves close to 20,000 people. Next up is building structures to house the park’s eight-person maintenance team to better manage repairs and upkeep.

Broadening Fairyland’s story content is also a goal. Later this year, Fairyland will debut a puppet program inspired by Native American folklore as Metz and Miller seek to continue to diversify Fairyland’s offerings.

“There’s people whose stories are not being told in the park,” says Miller. “Most of the stories told here are Northern European in nature. So it’s really my job to unpack some of that with staff and figure out how to create more access.”

And long-term, Miller would love to add some fresh fairy tale installations. That would require successful fundraising endeavors, but Miller stresses any future additions would be in line with what already exists, meaning a focus on imaginative play rather than “digital expression.”

Old fashioned, yet inventive and timeless. That’s the Children’s Fairyland way.

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TRENDY TOWNS

America’s Biggest Small Town

Hallmark fans and sports fans are equally welcome in Kansas City, where warmth, connection, and charm go hand-in-hand

By Tony Winders & Carmen Zermeno

Kansas City reveals itself not all at once but through moments—shared meals, friendly conversations, unexpected kindness, and the quiet confidence of a city that knows what it offers and is eager to share it.

We experienced Kansas City through two lenses, shaped by different passions and united by curiosity and affection. What made this trip memorable wasn’t just what we came for but how easily the city allowed us to experience so much more of the unexpected that defines it.

For Carmen, the anchor was the Hallmark Christmas Experience, held at Crown Center. The multiday immersive event celebrates the storytelling universe of Hallmark: the films, series and stars, and the fans who love them. The experience included access to live sessions such as Behind the Lens, where Hallmark actors and creators discussed the craft behind their movies, and Reindeer Games, a spirited onstage competition that leaned fully into fun. Outside, Hallmark created an open-air square complete with a light walk, Jingle Bars, local artisans, ice-skating, and a tree-lighting ceremony.

One of the most meaningful touches was the Hallmark Card-Sending Station. True to the company’s Kansas City roots, guests were invited to pick a card, write a message, and drop it into one of two mailboxes directed to loved ones or Hallmark stars. It was heartfelt and deeply on brand, representing a bridge between Hallmark’s origins in greeting cards and its future in entertainment.

For Tony, Kansas City’s sports culture provided a parallel rhythm to the weekend as a lifelong Chiefs fan. We warmed up at Tavern on 103rd, our local bar of choice, where barkeep Bob Yancey helped set the tone and connected us with access to the Bud Light VIP Tailgate Party, complete with music from local DJ Jody Rhew. A visit to Arrowhead Stadium reinforced why the Kansas City Chiefs resonate far beyond football. From the moment we arrived, volunteers greeted fans carrying signs that read, “How may I help you?”—a phrase that echoed throughout our time in the city. Chiefs Kingdom is loud, proud, and deeply communal, yet authentically welcoming. During the game, the Hallmark Christmas Experience even appeared on the stadium’s video screens during

TONY WINDERS



MIKE MAHIN/SHUTTERSTOCK

a fan-cam moment. Paid promotion, yes, but also something more revealing: Kansas City institutions lifting one another up, confident enough to share the spotlight and proud of what they represent together.

Food, of course, was its own narrative. At Gates Bar-B-Q, we were met with the call that made it famous: “Hi, may I help you?” a phrase not just full of hospitality but also identity within this city. Denise (“Nisey”) took a photo with us, sauce-stained fingers and all, as we dug into burnt ends and long beef ribs in the same booth where she says actor Jason Sudeikis sat for a scene in “Ted Lasso.”

Closer to our home base, dinner at Rye on the Country Club Plaza delivered exactly what the moment called for. Here we were served casual gourmet in the truest sense, with comforting precision: a perfectly prepared ribeye, rich macaroni and cheese, and homemade pies that felt like exclamation marks at the end of a great day. It’s the kind of place that locals rely on and visitors remember.

Another night we noshed at Gram & Dun, an easy walk from where we were staying. Upscale but relaxed, it captured Kansas City’s culinary confidence, refined without being formal, inventive without losing warmth. Another late night called for a stop at Winstead’s, where hospitality and comfort food are delivered exactly as they have been for generations—affordable and with friendly service.

Where we stayed shaped everything. Touted as an “urban inn,” Southmoreland on the Plaza blends the elegance of a historic mansion with the ease of a private residence. Keyless entry and a self-serve continental breakfast replace a traditional front desk, creating a stay that feels independent and unhurried.

Some travelers may appreciate the autonomy this offers, while others might prefer a more traditional greeting—but either way, the house quickly invites you to settle in and make it your own. Rooms are named after Kansas City luminaries—ours was Kathryn Winstead—and gracious common spaces encourage lingering. Artwork lines the halls through a partnership with the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, located just steps away, reinforcing the sense that this is a place to inhabit rather than simply check into.

Evenings often ended back at Southmoreland, watching Hallmark+ streaming content in the cozy shared living room or in the comfort of our room. It felt warm, quiet, and personal. We met fellow guests easily, including a couple celebrating their first anniversary whose car we gave a jump in the driveway. Strangers becoming neighbors, if only briefly.

Just as the city beckons a gathering of longtime friends, it creates opportuni-



VISITKC

▲ Streetcars in Kansas City, Mo., are already preparing for the FIFA World Cup later this year.



WIRESTOCK CREATORS/SHUTTERSTOCK

▲ Kansas City’s Arrowhead Stadium holds a Guinness World Record for the loudest outdoor stadium, reaching 142.2 decibels during a 2014 game.

ties for never meeting a stranger. One morning, Tony hosted a breakfast with civic and business leaders, including representatives from Visit KC, the Kansas City Area Development Council, Back2KC, the University of Central Missouri and the office of Mayor Quinton Lucas. The conversation offered an inside look at a city preparing thoughtfully for FIFA World Cup 2026, not just with infrastructure but with intention. Plans like “Kansas City House,” a plaza-based hospitality club envisioned as a living room for international visitors, reflect a city thinking globally while staying true to its genuine self. The gathering of the minds just shows how much the locals love their city.

We didn’t get to everything. We missed nights of live jazz. We didn’t linger long enough in the museums. And that, perhaps, is the point. Kansas City doesn’t reveal itself in a weekend; it invites return.

As the world looks toward World Cup 2026, host city Kansas City, Missouri, is ready. Whether you come for FIFA, the Country Club Plaza, Hallmark, a Chiefs or Royals game, jazz, art, or food, or whether you add Kansas City as an extra week alongside a visit to another U.S. city, you’ll find a place that leads with its heart and where everyone is welcome.

Kansas City isn’t just prepared for the world stage. It’s prepared to take care of you while you’re here.

Tony Winders and Carmen Zermeno are freelance writers. To read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate website at Creators.com. Copyright 2026 Creators.com.



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◀ Helpers at Arrowhead Stadium welcome fans to a Chiefs game in Kansas City, Mo.



SEAN PAVONE/SHUTTERSTOCK

Kansas City, Mo., combines Midwestern charm with growing cultural and culinary sophistication.



Elephants up Close in San Diego

The Safari Park’s Elephant Valley invites visitors to explore a 13-acre habitat designed for the gentle giants



Two of eight elephants eat during an Elephant Valley preview.

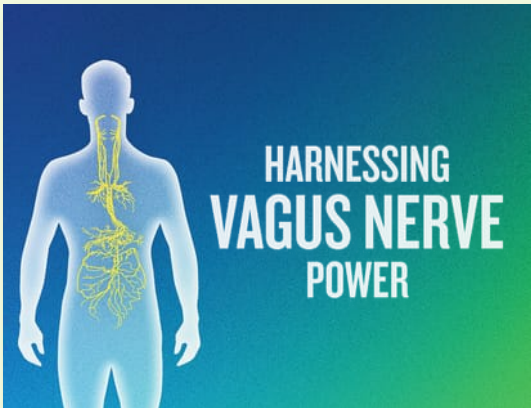
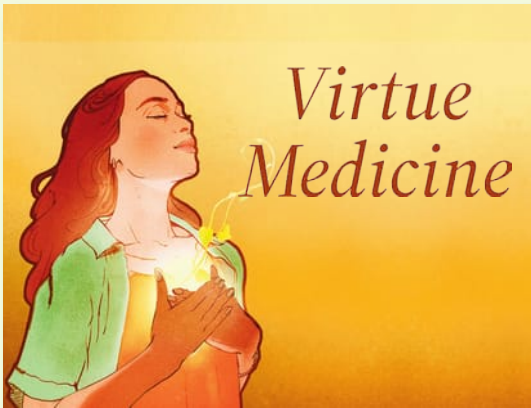
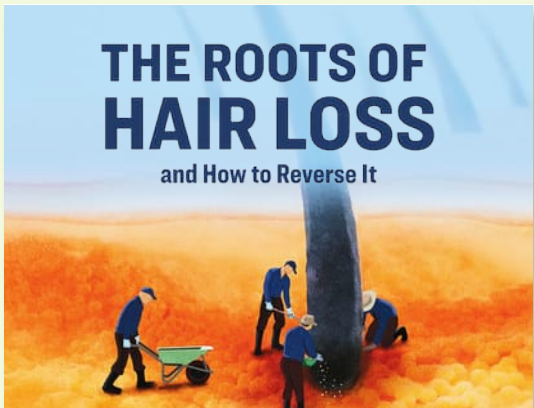
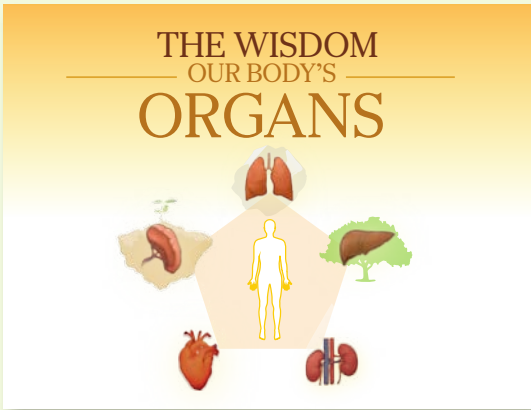
By Todd Martens

SAN DIEGO—Before we see elephants at Elephant Valley in the San Diego Zoo Safari Park, we come face to face with destruction—only, the wreckage is beautiful. A long, winding path takes guests around and under felled trees. Aged gray tree hunks form arches, for instance, over bridges that tower over clay-colored paths with hoof prints. The design is meant to reorient us, to take us on a trail walked not by humans but traversed and carved by elephants, a creature still misunderstood, vilified, and hunted for its cataclysmic-like ability to reshape land and sometimes communities. “It starts,” says Kristi Burtis, vice president of wildlife care for the Safari Park, “by telling the story that elephants are ecosystem engineers.” Elephant Valley will open March 5 as the newest experience at the Escondido park. Its aim is to bring guests closer than ever to the zoo’s eight elephants,

which range in age from 7 to 36, while more heavily focusing on conservation. The centerpiece of the 13-acre-plus parkland is a curved bridge overlooking a savanna, allowing elephants to walk under guests. But there are also nooks, such as a cave that, while not previewed at a recent media event, will allow visitors to view elephants on their level. In a shift from, say, the Safari Park’s popular tram tour, there are no fences and visible enclosures. Captive elephants remain a sometimes controversial topic, and the zoo’s herd is a mix of rescues and births, but the goal was to create a space where humans are at once removed and don’t impede on the relative free-roaming ability of the animals by keeping guests largely elevated. As an example of just how close people can get to the herd, there was a moment of levity at the event when one of the elephants began flinging what was believed to be a mixture of dirt and feces up onto the bridge. “Our guests are going to be able to see the hairs on an elephant,” Burtis says. “They can see their eyes. They can see the eyelashes. They can see how muscular their trunks are. It’s really going to be a different experience.” Elephant Valley, complete with a multi-story lodge with open-air restaurants and bars, boasts a natural design that isn’t influenced by the elephant’s African home so much as it is in conversation with it. The goal isn’t to displace us, but to import communal artistry—Kenyan wood and beadwork can be found in the pathways, resting spaces, and more—as a show of admiration rather than imitation. “We’re not going to pretend that we’re taking people to Africa,” says Fri Forjindam, now a creative executive with Universal’s theme parks but previously a lead designer on Elephant Valley via her role as a chief development officer at Mycotoo, a Pasadena-based experiential design firm. “That is a slippery slope of theming that can go wrong really fast,” she adds. “How do we recognize where we are right now, which is near San Diego? How do we populate this plane with plants that are indigenous to the region? The story of coexistence is important. We’re not extracting from Africa, we’re learning. We’re not extracting from el-

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ephants, we’re sharing information.” But designing a space that is elephant-first yet also built for humans presented multiple challenges, especially when the collaborating teams were aiming to construct multiple narratives around the animals. Since meetings about Elephant Valley began around 2019, the staff has worked to touch on themes related to migration and conservation. And there was also a desire to personalize the elephants.

“Where can we also highlight each of the elephants by name, so they aren’t just this huge herd of random gray creatures?” Forjindam says. “You see that in the lodge.”

That lodge, the Mkutano House—a phrase that means “gathering” in Swahili—should provide opportunities for guests to linger, although zoo representatives say reservations are recommended for those who wish to dine in the space (there will also be a walk-up, to-go window). Menus have yet to be released, but the ground floor of the structure, boasting hut-like roofing designed to blend into the environment, features close views of the elephant grazing pool as well as an indoor space with a centerpiece tree beneath constellation-like lighting to mimic sunrises and sunsets.

Throughout there are animal wood carvings and beadwork, the latter often hung from sculptures made of tree branches. The ceiling, outfitted with colorful cloth tapestries designed to move with the wind, aims to create less friction between indoor and outdoor environments.

There are, of course, research and educational goals of the space as well. The Safari Park works, for instance, with the Northern Rangelands Trust and Loisaba Conservancy in Kenya, with an emphasis on studying human-elephant conflict and finding no-kill resolutions. Nonprofits and conservation groups estimate that there are today around 415,000 elephants in Africa, and the African savanna elephant is listed as endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Studies of the zoo’s young elephants are shared with the Reteti Elephant Sanctuary in the hopes of delivering care to elephant youth to prevent or-



▲ (Top) Water areas in Elephant Valley have been redesigned with ramps and steps to make it easier for the elephants to navigate. The hope is to inspire play.

▲ (Above) The view from Elephant Valley’s Mkutano House, a two-story dining destination in the new space at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park.

phaning. Additionally, the Safari Park has done extensive examination into the endotheliotropic herpes virus. “The data that we collect from elephants here, you can’t simply get from elephants in the wild,” Burtis says.

One of the two entrances to Elephant Valley is outfitted with bee boxes; bees are known to be a natural elephant deterrent and can help in preventing the animals from disrupting crops or communities. To encourage more natural behavior, the plane is outfitted with timed feeders in an attempt to encourage movement throughout the acreage and establish a level of real-life unpredictability in hunting for resources. Water areas have been redesigned with ramps and steps to make it easier for the elephants to navigate.

With Elephant Valley, Forjindam says the goal was to allow visitors to “observe safely in luxury—whatever that is—but not from a position of power, more as a cohabitor of the Earth, with as much natural elements as possible. It’s not to impose dominance. Ultimately, it needed to feel natural. It couldn’t feel like a man-made structure, which is an antiquated approach to any sort of safari experience where animals are the product, a prize. In this experience, this is the elephant’s home.”

And the resulting feel of Elephant Valley is that we, the paying customers, are simply their house guests.

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The goal isn’t to displace us, but to import communal artistry—Kenyan wood and beadwork can be found in the pathways, resting spaces, and more—as a show of admiration rather than imitation.

◀ An aerial view of Elephant Valley at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park, home to eight elephants.

Special Coverage

Mr. Li Hongzhi is the founder of the spiritual discipline Falun Gong (also called Falun Dafa). The practice combines meditation and gentle exercises with a moral philosophy centered on the tenets of truthfulness, compassion, and tolerance.

Mr. Li is a four-time Nobel Peace Prize nominee. He is also the recipient of Freedom House’s International Religious Freedom Award.

After Mr. Li introduced the practice to the public in China in the early 1990s, an estimated 70 million to 100 million people started practicing. Since then, the practice has spread to more than 100 countries around the world. Despite this, in China, the practice has been subjected to extreme persecution by the Chinese Communist Party.

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