

EPOCH INSIGHT



MUSK'S NEURALINK FRIEND OR FOE?

BY PETR SVAB



Neuralink: Friend or Foe?

AN IMPLANTED CHIP IN YOUR BRAIN, controlled by your thoughts?

If this technology sounds far off, you might be surprised to learn it's already far advanced.

At the forefront of this technological push is Neuralink, a company co-founded by Elon Musk.

The technology is being promoted on its potential merits to help the disabled regain certain functions, such as helping paralyzed people communicate or partially restore vision to the blind.

Experts, however, warn of the expansive ethical, safety, security, privacy, and even philosophical implications associated with the technology.

"We're going to have to have some serious ethical conversations," Nicholas Hatsopoulos, a neurology professor at the University of Chicago, told The Epoch Times.

Other experts are more outspoken.

"I think that is likely a really bad idea," said Mark Churchland, associate professor of neuroscience at Columbia University.

Read this week's cover story to learn about Neuralink's technology and the opportunities and ethical questions it raises.

JASPER FAKKERT
Editor-in-chief




ON THE COVER

Elon Musk co-founded a company named Neuralink that has made advances in creating a neural-interface device that can be inserted in a person's brain and be controlled by thoughts.

MAJA HITIJ/GETTY IMAGES, ILLUSTRATION BY THE EPOCH TIMES

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The Biden administration is expanding a parole program, previously only available to Venezuelans, to would-be immigrants from Cuba, Nicaragua, and Haiti. They are now eligible to apply for legal status for two years, provided they find a sponsor inside the United States and pass a background check.

DREW ANGERER/GETTY IMAGES



SPOTLIGHT

Radiant Life

FARMERS INSPECT SUNFLOWERS in a field on the outskirts of Bengaluru, India, on Jan. 3. Bengaluru is the capital of Karnataka state, which is one of the most important sunflower growing states in the country.

PHOTO BY MANJUNATH KIRAN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



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NATION • WORLD • WHAT HAPPENED THIS WEEK

Week 1

The Week



Incoming freight trains travel through Houston on Sept. 14, 2022.

PHOTO BY BRANDON BELL/GETTY IMAGES

States Face Pressure to Spend Taxpayer Money on Infrastructure **38**

Pedophilia in Culture

A counselor says that the general public doesn't understand the push to normalize pedophilia in society. **22**

Gun Control

Emails have revealed that the CDC removed key data on defensive gun use after meeting with activists. **26**

The Placebo Effect

A psychiatrist warns that positive expectations may have tainted existing study results of transgender treatments. **30**

INSIDE

“States and cities cannot continue to bear this burden alone and Congress needs to finally step up.”



Colorado Gov. Jared Polis, on transporting illegal immigrants who are flooding into the state to other major cities around the United States

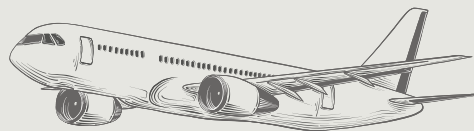
“[A recession is the] most likely outcome.”



Alan Greenspan, former chair of the Federal Reserve, about the U.S. economy

25,000 POINTS

Southwest Airlines CEO Bob Jordan is offering 25,000 frequent-flyer points, worth \$300,



to travelers who were affected by the cancellation of more than 15,000 flights over the Christmas holiday period.

150,000 VOTES — Election Watch, a Wisconsin election integrity watchdog organization, has discovered that more than 150,000 votes cast in the 2020 presidential election can't be connected with a valid address.

15 MILLION

There's an expectation that, as of Jan. 11, an estimated **15 million Americans will begin to lose health coverage.**

100 MILLION

Up to **100 million Americans will soon be enrolled in Medicaid**, according to the Foundation for Government Accountability.

10.5 MILLION

Job openings came in far higher than analysts expected, at 10.5 million as of the last day of November 2022, according to the Department of Labor.

THIS PAGE FROM TOP: JASON CONNOLLY-POOL/GETTY IMAGES; ALEX WONG/GETTY IMAGES; RIGHT PAGE FROM TOP: HANNAN TOR/SHUTTERSTOCK; JOHN MOORE/GETTY IMAGES

VACCINES

CDC Finds Hundreds of Safety Signals for COVID-19 Vaccines

THE CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL and Prevention (CDC) has identified hundreds of safety signals for the two most widely administered COVID-19 vaccines, according to monitoring results obtained by The Epoch Times.

Bell's palsy, blood clotting, and death were among the signals flagged through analysis of adverse event reports submitted to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System.

The CDC's primary analysis compared the reports made for specific events suffered after receipt of a Moderna or Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine to the reports lodged following vaccination with any other vaccine, or all non-COVID-19 vaccines. The type of analysis is known as a proportional reporting ratio.

Safety signals mean a condition may be linked to a vaccine.

ARIZONA

Border Wall Dismantled in Arizona as Katie Hobbs Becomes Governor

ARIZONA HAS STARTED to dismantle its makeshift border wall made of shipping containers that was championed by former Gov. Doug Ducey but was the target of a Biden administration lawsuit and faced opposition from newly minted Gov. Katie Hobbs.

Footage taken on Jan. 3 showed construction machinery removing a line of shipping containers placed along the U.S.-Mexico border in Yuma, Arizona, which coincided with the day Hobbs was sworn in as governor.



A U.S. Border Patrol agent searches for immigrants by the U.S.-Mexico border fence near Douglas, Ariz., on Nov. 3, 2022.



A U-Haul van parked in a company lot in Santa Maria, Calif., on June 29, 2022.

NATION

More U-Haul Trucks Left California Than Any Other State in 2022: Study

MORE MOVING TRUCKS LEFT from California than any other state in 2022 for the third year in a row, while more Americans are flocking to Republican-led states such as Texas and Florida, a study has found.

The study, conducted by moving truck rental company U-Haul, found that Texas, Florida, and the Carolinas were the preferred destinations for one-way moving trucks in 2022, with those states ranking as the top growth states on the annual U-Haul Growth Index.

U-Haul's Growth Index is compiled according to the net gain of oneway U-Haul trucks arriving in a state or city, versus those departing from that state or city each calendar year across the United States and Canada and is a strong indicator of how well states and cities are attracting and maintaining residents, according to the company.

NATURAL GAS

US to Become Top LNG Exporter in 2023: Report

THE UNITED STATES is on course to surpass the world's largest exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG) in 2023, according to ship-tracking data compiled by Bloomberg, which noted the United States and Qatar both exported 81.2 million tons of LNG last year.

The United States could already have been the world's largest exporter of LNG if it weren't for an explosion and fire in mid-2022 at a key export facility in Freeport, Texas.

With the Freeport LNG facility fully operational, U.S. exports would have hit 86 million tons, Rystad Energy, a world-leading analysis company for the oil and gas industry, said in late 2022, which would have officially made the United States the largest LNG exporter globally.

Rystad Energy said in a recent report that U.S. LNG output is set to jump 11 percent in 2023 when Freeport LNG's capacity is fully restored, which will outpace the current trajectory of top exporters Qatar and Australia by millions. Australia is currently the world's third-largest supplier.



Travelers walk with their luggage at Chengdu Shuangliu International Airport in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China, on Dec. 30, 2022.

CHINA

Beijing Threatens ‘Countermeasures’ After Countries Adopt COVID-19 Curbs on Chinese Travelers

THE CHINESE REGIME has taken aim at what it calls “unacceptable” measures adopted by multiple countries for travelers from China, as the nation battles with an influx of new COVID-19 cases.

During a daily briefing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning claimed the measures “lack scientific basis.”

The comments come after Australia and Canada joined a growing number of countries that now require passengers coming from China to test negative for COVID-19 prior to boarding their flight.

Ning said that the regime “will take countermeasures based on the principle of reciprocity,” without providing further details regarding the countermeasures.

In the United States, the Biden administration said there was no cause for retaliation from Beijing after Washington’s decision to require a negative COVID-19 test from those who travel from China to the United States.

“There’s no cause for retaliation here just because countries around the world are taking prudent health measures to protect their citizens,” White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said during a press conference.

“That’s what you’re seeing from us and others.”

CANADA

Canada Sets Record With Over 400,000 New Immigrants in 2022

CANADA REACHED 431,645 new immigrants last year, setting a new record. The country is on track to have immigrants make up 30 percent of the population by 2036. By contrast, immigrants made up 20.7 percent of the population in 2011.

According to the federal government, immigration accounts for almost 100 percent of labor force growth and 75 percent of the country’s immigration growth. India and China were the top countries from which immigration originated, according to the 2021 Census and Statistics Canada.

WORLD

Social Media Negatively Affecting Young People’s Body Image: Study

SOCIAL MEDIA ARE DRIVING children to have a low sense of self-worth and be dissatisfied with their appearances, according to a study published by London-based mental health charity stem4.

“Social media is definitely negatively affecting me. As young people, we constantly compare ourselves to good-looking people online. On sites like TikTok, the only people you see are gorgeous due to the algorithms and that makes us feel really bad about ourselves,” said a young person who was quoted in the study.

The study surveyed children who use smartphone apps, such as TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp. It found that 77 percent of the respondents were unhappy about how they looked, with some saying that they were “embarrassed” by their bodies.

Forty-five percent of those surveyed said they had been regularly bullied or trolled online about their physical appearance, having to deal with comments such as “You looked better when you were anorexic.” As a result, 24 percent of them responded by becoming withdrawn, 22 percent began to exercise excessively, 18 percent stopped socializing, 18 percent chose to drastically restrict their food intake, and 13 percent inflicted self-harm.

Overall, half of the respondents shared the sentiment of fear—if they didn’t try to improve their bodies, they would be rejected by their friends and nobody would like them.

The survey also found that 42 percent of the children—51 percent of females and 31 percent of males—said they were in mental health distress.

Additionally, 17 percent said they had problems with body image issues, while 14 percent said they were experiencing eating difficulties, such as restrictive eating, binge eating, and purging or vomiting.

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The Week in Photos



1.

1. Fans and supporters hold a minute's applause in memory of former Brazil soccer player Pele, who died on Dec. 29, 2022, at City Ground in Nottingham, England, on Jan. 1.

2. People celebrate New Year's Day taking the traditional first dip of the year at Sant Sebastia beach in Barceloneta, Spain, on Jan. 1.



2.

3. Light fog blankets St. Peter's Basilica, in the Vatican on Jan. 1. Former Pope Benedict XVI died on Dec. 31, 2022, at the age of 95.

4. Racehorses participate in the Bet Goodwin Best Odds Guaranteed Handicap Hurdle at Plumpton Racecourse in Plumpton, England, on Jan. 2.

5. U.S. House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) speaks to reporters at the U.S. Capitol in Washington on Jan. 3. McCarthy continued to fail to receive enough votes for speaker of the House as the voting process became a deadlock.

6. Fireworks light up the sky over Sydney Harbour Bridge during the New Year's Eve celebration in Sydney on Jan. 1.



3.



6.



4.



5.

Neuralink was founded in 2016 by the world's second-richest man, prolific entrepreneur Elon Musk.

PHOTO BY JIM WATSON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

TECHNOLOGY

THE

▶ *HOPES*

AND

NEURALINK BRAIN IMPLANT PROMISING FOR DISABLED, OMINOUS FOR MASSES, EXPERTS SAY

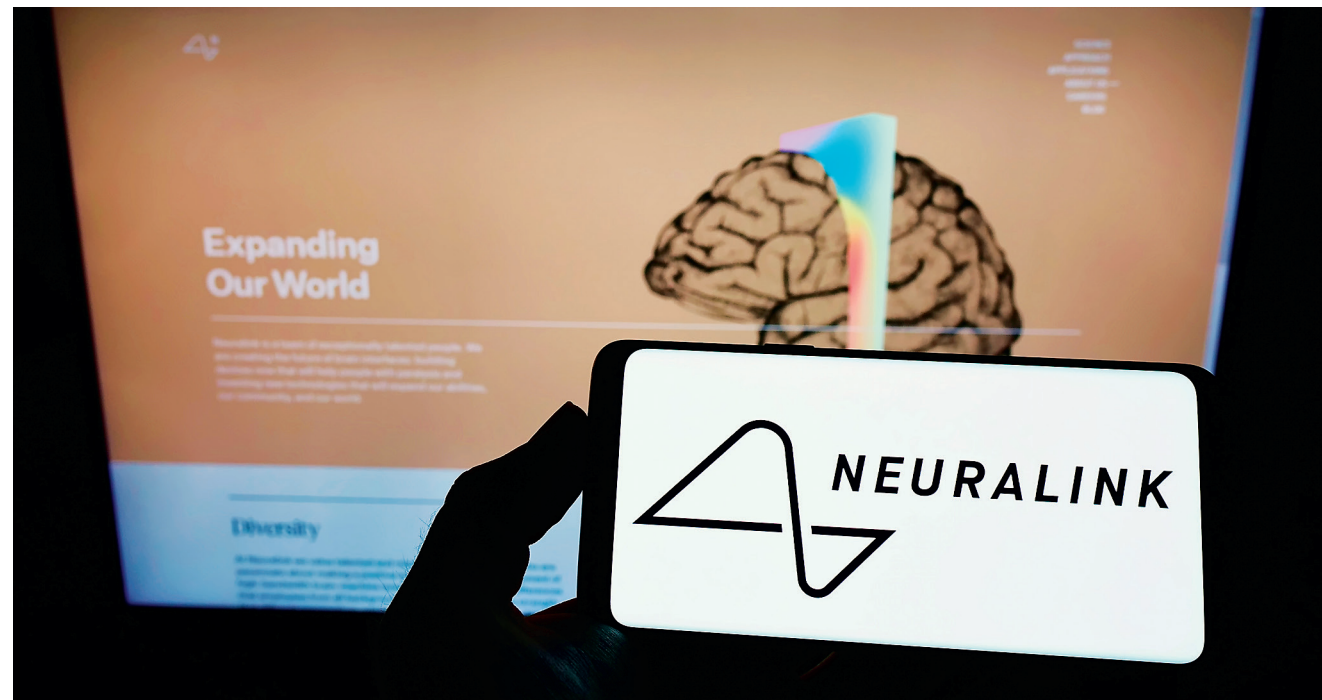
▶ *FEARS*

OF

A photograph of Elon Musk with his arms outstretched, set against a background of binary code and a brain silhouette. The text 'MUSK'S NEURALINK' is overlaid on the bottom half of the image.

**MUSK'S
NEURALINK**

BY PETR SVAB



The Neuralink company logo is displayed on a phone screen (foreground) and on its website on a computer screen.

THE NEURALINK IMPLANT THAT AIMS to allow a person to control a computer with thoughts has good potential to achieve its initial goal of helping paralyzed people communicate. It may, at least to some extent, help restore vision for the blind. It may, to a significant degree, restore limb control for those with spine injuries, according to several neuroscientists.

But when it comes to Neuralink’s broader goals of letting healthy people interface with computers directly via the mind, the technical capability is achievable, but would lead to expansive ethical, safety, security, privacy, and even philosophical issues, experts told *The Epoch Times*.

Neuralink—founded in 2016 by the world’s second-richest man, prolific entrepreneur Elon Musk—recently applied to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for human trials of its brain implants. The company staged a three-hour presentation of its progress, including demonstrations of a monkey controlling a computer with its mind, a robot that can handle some of the most delicate parts of the required brain implant insertion surgery, as well as a pig whose legs can be controlled remotely by a computer.

The presentation also included a monkey with a brain implant that made it see flashes of light, a step toward the company’s proposition to restore vision for the blind.

“The overarching goal of Neuralink is to create, ultimately, a whole brain interface. So a generalized input-output device that in the long term literally could interface with every aspect of your brain and in the short term can interface with any given section of your brain and solve a tremendous number of things that cause debilitating issues for people,”

Musk said during the presentation.

The Neuralink technology “makes a lot of sense” for helping people with disabilities, said Nicho Hatsopoulos, a neurology professor at the University of Chicago and one of the pioneers of brain-computer interface development.

“It is impressive, actually,” he said after seeing the Neuralink presentation.

Mark Churchland, associate professor of neuroscience at Columbia University and an expert on brain signal decoding, commended Neuralink for bringing the brain-computer interface technology a long way from experiment to product.

“They seem to have a solid wireless interface, which is not an easy thing to build. And going from needing racks of equipment and computers to needing an iPhone is impressive,” he said.

“In terms of the actual experiments, it’s not doing anything that hasn’t been done before, but if you’re doing it better and more easily, that counts for a lot.”

When it comes to the company’s plans to one day mass-produce the implants for use by anybody and everybody, both Hatsopoulos and Churchland were much more reserved.

“We’re going to have to have some serious ethical conversations,” Hatsopoulos said, noting that “it’s one thing to help restore function in people who have a disability,” but “another thing to augment people.”

“Augmentation is going to be a big ethical concern,” he said. Churchland was more blunt.

“I think that is likely a really bad idea,” he said.

Other experts raised concerns as well, ranging from philosophical questions over free will to security and privacy issues with regard to data collected from the brain as well as the potential to hack the implant.

LEVEL 1: MIND MOUSE

Neuralink’s initial goal is to enable physically incapacitated people to control a computer. At the current stage of development, the implant is roughly the size of a small stack of quarters. To install it, first, a piece of skin would be cut and peeled off the skull of the patient. Then, a small hole would be drilled in the skull. Next, a series of extremely thin, flexible wires would be connected to a thin needle one by one and stuck by a robotic machine inside the surface layer of the brain in the motor cortex area. The implant would be placed inside the hole in the skull, sealing it. The skin would be sewn over it and, as it heals, the implant would become invisible from the outside.

The person would be asked to think, for instance, about moving their hand in a certain direction. Corresponding brain activity signals from the implant would be collected over a period of time, translated to computer data and commands via artificial intelligence and voila—the implant would then allow the person to control a computer with their mind.

The Neuralink presentation proved the concept by showing a video of a monkey with the implant. The primate moved a mouse cursor to highlighted positions on a computer screen, getting bits of banana smoothie through a tube as a reward.

The science has only recently reached a point where multiple companies have decided to try to move it from research to a marketable product, an expert says.

The underlying technology is real and a similar experiment has been repeated many times by researchers using various methods, according to Shinsuke Shimojo, a professor of experimental psychology at the California Institute of Technology.

In fact, a similar effect can be achieved even without sticking wires inside the brain as some brain activity can be detected on the surface of the head, he said, noting he’s currently working on one such technology.

“It can be recordable reasonably well from the electrodes outside of the skull,” Shimojo said. “Those are done already and it’s going to be even better.”

The more invasive path Neuralink has taken is more ambitious and more delicate.

Regulatory authorities don’t allow invasive experimental techniques unless there’s an urgent medical need, Shimojo noted.

“It’s not a science problem. It’s an ethical problem,” he said.

Such experiments have so far been approved on a small scale for research purposes.

In the early 2000s, implants developed by Cyberkinetics, a company co-founded by Hatsopoulos, were tested on several

physically disabled patients. The project fizzled out because its investors lost interest, he said.

The underlying software was acquired by a company called BrainGate in 2008 and clinical trials with small groups of patients have been ongoing at several research institutions, including one called BrainGate2 under the leadership of Leigh Hochberg, an engineering professor at Brown University.

Science has only recently reached a point where multiple companies have decid-

ed to try to move it from research to a marketable product, Hochberg said.

He’s currently helping several such companies, including Neuralink, which is now in talks with the FDA to run clinical trials that could lead to official ap-

proval of its implant as a form of treatment.

“Clinical trials of this type would generally take a few years,” Hochberg said.

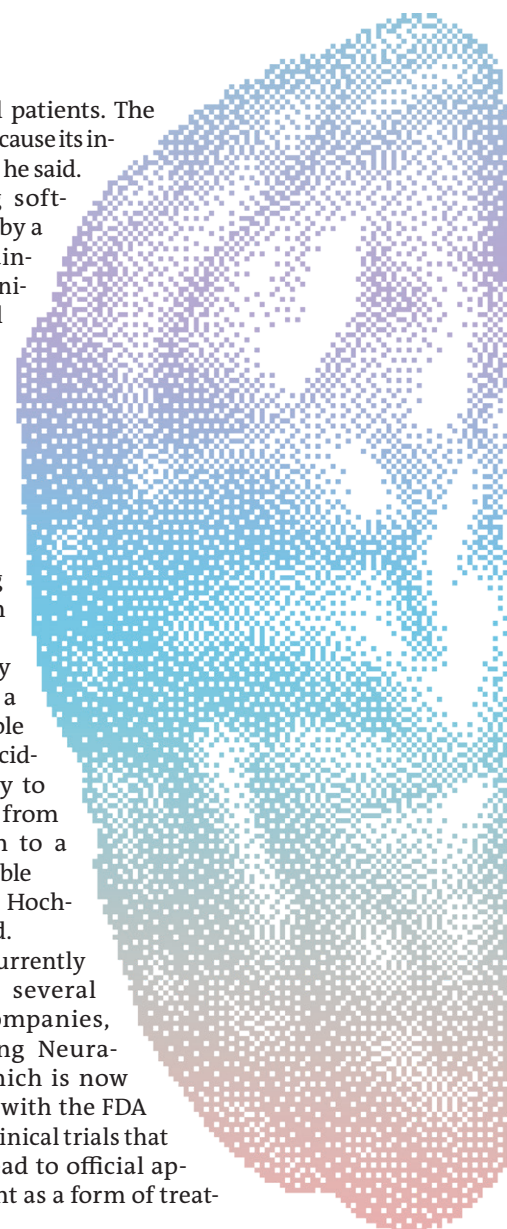
Each new iteration of the implants would then require further trials, though he hopes software improvements of the system could be incorporated “with perhaps more speed.”

The technology has been aided by advances in machine learning, which allows matching brain signal patterns with specific actions, such as moving a mouse cursor in a particular direction. Machine learning allows the correlation of brain patterns with physical outcomes without the need to understand the function of each specific neuron.

“That’s the difference between the scientific approach and the engineering approach,” Shimojo commented.

Scientists try to find out how things work, such as by exploring “how each neuron is wired” or “what’s the hierarchy of information processing in different parts of the brain,” he said. As a result, they try to drill down to causal relationships.

Engineers, on the other hand, try to solve a problem. If an artificial intelligence finds a pattern that matches the desired



T. SCHNEIDER/SHUTTERSTOCK

result 95 percent of the time, that may be good enough, he noted.

“I think right now it’s moving, especially because of this deep learning progress, in that direction.”

LEVEL 2: ARTIFICIAL EYE

The next step for the Neuralink technology would be to restore sight, the presenters said. The same implant would be inserted at the back of the skull and connected to the visual cortex, the part of the brain responsible for processing images from the eyes. A video stream from a camera would then be encoded as neural signals and used to stimulate neurons responsible for image processing, thus rendering a picture.

This seems to be possible in principle, but there may be difficulties in practice.

“There are some constraints that can be removed eventually by just technical advance. And then there are some intrinsic limitations related to how the visual cortex itself is organized,” Shimojo said.

Some neurons in the visual cortex indeed correspond to a location in the visual field. That means correct stimulation of

one location in the brain produces a flash of light at a particular location in one’s vision and stimulation of another location produces a flash of light at a different place. Experiments of this kind have been done in apes and Neuralink demonstrated one.

But “so far, the resolution is very, very low—ridiculously low,” Shimojo said.

The flashes of light such stimulation produces can only be positioned on a grid of perhaps 12 by 12 pixels, he said.

The picture quality can be improved by stimulating more neurons, i.e. inserting more electrodes into the brain. The Neuralink implant currently uses over 1,000 electrodes with a promise of 16,000 electrodes on the same chip. For the visual aid, the presentation proposed two implants with 16,000 electrodes each. If each electrode could be used to stimulate multiple “pixels,” perhaps a picture quality on par with a 1980s computer could be achieved.

But even if the number of electrodes is further boosted in the future, the resulting image quality would still be limited,

according to Shimojo.

The problem is that if one creates a topographic map of the visual field, assigning each neuron to its position in the field, the result is nowhere precise enough to make up a clear image.

“The topographic map is kind of crude and diffuse. It’s not pinpoint,” he said.

People see with clarity thanks to complex, multi-layer image processing by the brain where the signal can travel back and forth between the layers and where neurons help adjacent neurons with the tasks.

It’s not clear how the implant could achieve a comparable result, according to Shimojo.

“It’s not easily solved by the technical side,” he said.

Musk went as far as to suggest vision can be restored for people who are congenitally blind because even such people possess a visual cortex.

“Even if they’ve never seen before, we’re confident that they could see,” he said.

Hatsopoulos wasn’t so convinced.

“I’m not clear that that’s possible,” he said.

The issue is that the visual cortex “develops over the first several years of life” and the visual input from the eyes “helps organize how the visual cortex will function,” Hatsopoulos explained.

Around the age of two, the brain loses the initial ability to develop so rapidly.

That early development is “crucial,” he said, giving the example of children born with cataracts. The condition can be remedied by surgically replacing eye lenses, but it needs to be done early on. If the operation is performed too late, the patient won’t be able to see, even though all the physical parts are present and functioning.

“Everything is perfectly fine, but the person will not understand the visual input coming in,” Hatsopoulos said.

LEVEL 3: STRETCHING THE LIMBS

The Neuralink presentation outlined how the implants could restore limb control for people paralyzed after spine injuries. Aside from the implant in the motor cortex, another several implants would be inserted into the spine. Signals from the brain would then be recorded and sent to the spinal implants, bridging the part where the spinal cord is severed or damaged.

In principle, this is fully achievable, according to the experts.

“In fact, we’re doing that right now,” Hatsopoulos said. His university is working with a different implant technology that allows a patient to control a mechanical arm via the mind.

One challenge is to record from many neurons at the same time “to give you the rich kind of movement that you would want to get” in order to produce “movement that’s somewhat normal,” he said.

Reading from maybe a thousand neurons should suffice to restore “functional movement,” such as allowing a person to feed or dress themselves, Hatsopoulos said.

“Maybe not as quickly as they would if they had an intact system, but they can do it,” he said.

Based on its technical specifications, the Neuralink implant should enable a wide range of movement. Its presentation included a video of a pig with brain and spinal implants that

bent its leg and stretched its thighs in response to commands sent to the implants.

Facilitating complex movement, such as playing a piano, would probably require thousands of electrodes, Hatsopoulos said, noting “we’re taking baby steps right now.”

Another challenge is fine-tuning the stimulation so it targets muscle threads that don’t tire quickly.

“You’ve got to do more than just activate muscles,” Churchland said.

“You’ve got to activate them in a relatively natural way to avoid fatigue. And that’s definitely doable, but it’s certainly not trivial.”

It’s helpful in this endeavor that patients usually actively cooperate to make the solution work. Even though the number of electrodes may create a bottleneck, with effort, patients could rewire their brains to take maximum advantage of the interface.

“With practice, they can get better at it,” Hatsopoulos said.

The ability to move, however, is not enough. To truly restore function to a limb requires fixing the sense of touch too.

That means recording sensory impulses from the limb and sending them to another implant in the brain’s sensory cortex.

In principle, that has already been done as well. Stimulating some brain cells, for example, can create an impression that one is touching something, Hatsopoulos said, referring to experiments done at his university. The issue, again, is reading from and stimulating enough neurons to create a sufficiently robust touch experience.

The technology still has a long way to go in this regard, Hochberg acknowledged.

“It’s early, but exciting days,” he said.

For truly natural movement, however, one would need to go further yet.

A healthy person not only senses limb movement from what he touches externally, but also gets a sense of movement and limb position from inside the body.

The phenomenon is called proprioception. Scientists know that certain brain areas receive those kinds of sensory inputs, but it’s not quite known how it works.

“That’s the next frontier in this field,” Hatsopoulos said. “No one has cracked that yet.”

“Nothing is bulletproof. Nothing is foolproof. When they tell you it’s unhackable, it’s usually hacked in five minutes, whatever it is.”

Gary Miliefsky, CEO, Cyber Defense Media Group

LEVEL 4: CYBORGS

Musk envisions Neuralink going far beyond helping the disabled. He portrayed it more as a natural next step from a smartphone or smartwatch. Just like “replacing a piece of skull with a smartwatch for lack of a better analogy,” as he put it.

“I could have a Neuralink device implanted right now and you wouldn’t even know. I mean, hypothetically, I may be one of these demos. In fact, one of these demos I will,” he said to laughs and cheers from the audience.

He argued that “we are all already cyborgs in a way that your phone and your computer are extensions of yourself.”

“I’m sure you found if you leave your phone behind you end up tapping your pockets and it’s like having missing limb syndrome,” he said.

Neuralink for healthy people, however, may be far in the future, if it ever comes.

“The FDA is not going to approve this for use in healthy individuals. At least in this version of the implant,” Hatsopoulos said, noting that “you would have to show an incredible level of safety.”

Shimojo expressed a similar sentiment.

“If the safety is proven, then there’s a possibility, in the long, long future, that maybe intact, healthy people have electrodes inside of the brain. But I don’t think that’s going to happen soon,” he said.

The technology would likely have to get to a point of giving disabled people greater capabilities than healthy people have.

Musk believes the implant would indeed bestow superior capabilities.

“We’re confident that someone who has basically no other interface to the outside world would be able to control their phone better than someone who has working hands,” he said.

But even if the implant is technically safe in the sense that it wouldn’t accidentally harm the user and even if it eventually passes regulatory muster, the technology faces other problems that may prove intractable.

Data Security

The Neuralink implant currently communicates with a computer using Bluetooth. That can be hacked by a number of easily available tools, according to Gary Miliefsky, a cybersecurity expert, head of Cyber Defense Media Group, and a founding member of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

“If you’re in the proximity of the person, you will probably be able to steal some data. So that’s not secure,” he said.

As a first step, the communication between the implant and a computer would need to be encrypted, but that would drain the battery and processing power on the implant.

Even then, “people will find ways to hack” the implants, Miliefsky said.

There are already devices that can “unwind” SSL and TLS encryption protocols commonly used to secure emails, he said. And new technologies can go even further.

“Quantum computing can probably break today’s encryption pretty easily,” he said. ♦

There's "quantum-proof" encryption on the horizon, but the processing power it requires is far beyond anything a small implant could handle now or even in the upcoming decades, he estimated.

"Nothing is bulletproof. Nothing is foolproof. When they tell you it's unhackable, it's usually hacked in five minutes, whatever it is," he said.

Even if the implant-computer communication is somehow secured, the brain activity data could still be exfiltrated from the computer, such as by infecting the computer with malware.

"Seventy percent of new malware gets past all the virus scanners," Miliefsky noted.

And even if the data is somehow secured on the computer, it would still need to be accessed by technicians servicing the implant.

Anybody with insider access to the Neuralink system would immediately become a prime target for every intelligence agency and every malicious actor in the world, Miliefsky acknowledged.

"They'll be unsuspecting victims. Absolutely," he said.

And that doesn't even include the issue of covert operatives of all sorts lining up for jobs at Neuralink.

"Insider threat defense is a big issue," Miliefsky said.

Yet another area of concern is that, once the data exists, there's a chance the government could use the legal process to force Neuralink to preserve the data and share it for purposes of criminal investigations, counterintelligence, national security, and intelligence collection.

Brain Hack

The implications of a hacked implant appear difficult to fully grasp.

People seem to be willing to accept some level of privacy intrusion. Smartphones, for example, can easily be used to listen in on a person and track one's movement.

"We're walking around with spyware every day," Miliefsky said.

A brain implant, however, can produce personal data on another level of intimacy.

From the motor cortex, an implant could record a wide range of body movements, according to Hochberg.

"It continues to, I think, both amaze and pleasantly surprise a lot of people in the field just how rich the information is that can be extracted from small areas of the motor cortex," he said.

From the visual cortex, everything a person sees could theoretically be recorded, albeit likely in low resolution.

Moreover, the implant would be under the skin, meaning it can't be removed by the user and it can't be turned off as it needs to maintain the capability of being turned on and off remotely.

Worse yet, the implant can send signals into the brain too.

Issuing commands to the motor cortex could make one move involuntarily.

Theoretically, it's possible to make a remote-controlled human, Hatsopoulos confirmed.

Sending visual signals could make one see things that aren't there, distract a person, or perhaps obstruct vision with flashes of light, the Neuralink experiments indicate.

Churchland, however, dismissed such concerns as too far removed from the technology's current reality.

"It's not physically impossible, but it's extremely improbable," he said.

"Concerns about external manipulation, I think, are fanciful for the foreseeable future."

LEVEL 5: FAR FROM 'THE MATRIX'

Musk expects to go even further. As the electrode insertion technology improves, the implant will be able to reach deep areas of the brain as well, according to the presentation.

Those parts of the brain are responsible for thought activity such as memory processing, emotion, motivation, and abstract thinking.

Yet the know-how for decoding signals from these parts of the brain is so far limited, according to Shimojo.

Machine learning can recognize patterns with a high degree of probability, but some level of ambiguity may be "intrinsic," he said.

"The brain is complicated and one neuron is not participating in one task. The same neuron can be participating in different networks for entirely different purposes. It's really highly context-dependent and environment-dependent."

Whether it's possible to fully decode such thought processes remains an open question.

"Even among neuroscientists, there are different opinions," he said, noting that such difficulties may need "some clever creativity to deal with."

"So is this eventually overcome? It may be, but it's very long-run. It's not as easy as those demonstrations may indicate."

Hypothetically, the ability to truly read and write in deeper areas of the brain would raise profound ethical and philosophical questions.

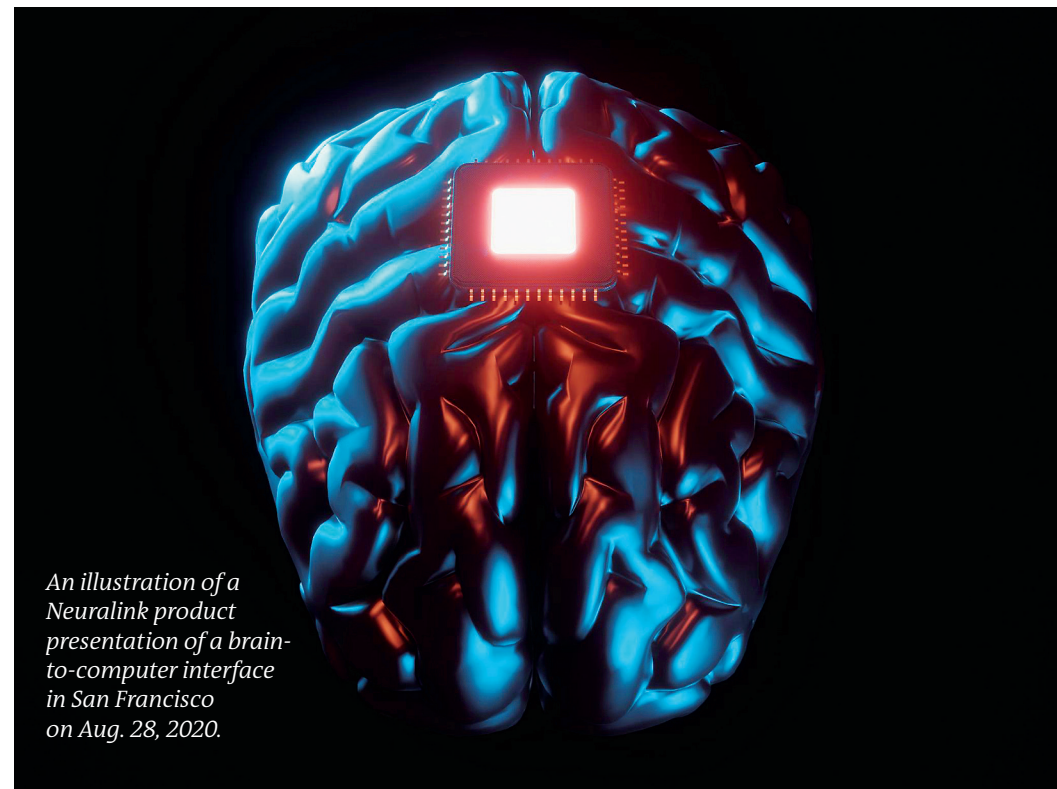
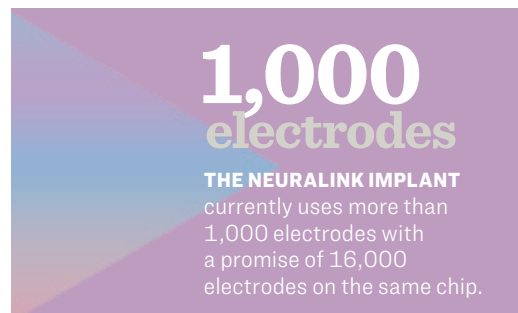
Accessing memory processing centers, for example, would open another floodgate of privacy and security issues, according to Miliefsky, from password theft to national, corporate, and personal secret exfiltration.

"There is not a single computer on the internet that I would say is safe and secure from a loss of privacy or having enough

security that you could say, 'Jimmy, who's got the implant, all of his private thoughts are still secure.' And it's not going to happen," he said.

Furthermore, linking brain parts responsible for decision-making with an AI would put in question the integrity of free will, Shimojo argued.

"If you and AI together make a decision about an action, is that your free will or is it hybrid free will?" he asked.



An illustration of a Neuralink product presentation of a brain-to-computer interface in San Francisco on Aug. 28, 2020.

ALEXANDRA SOVA/SHUTTERSTOCK

"Is it ok for people? Is it ok for society? What's going to happen to elections, for instance?"

As Musk explained during multiple talks, interfacing with an AI is actually the primary goal of why he pursued the implant technology to begin with.

His original motivation for starting Neuralink, he said, was to address the rapid development of artificial intelligence.

During the presentation and in previous talks, he opined that as AI develops, it's likely to far surpass human intelligence. At that point, even if it turns out to be benevolent, it may treat humans as a lower life form.

"We'll be like the house cat," he said at the Recode's Code Conference in 2016.

The solution would be to prevent AI power from getting centralized in a few hands, he argued.

"If instead AI power is broadly distributed and to a degree that we can link AI power to each individual's will," meaning everybody would have control over their own AI servant, "then if somebody did try to do something really terrible then the collective will of others could overcome that bad actor," he said.

For that reason, he said, he co-founded OpenAI in 2015, a nonprofit developing AI that should be made available for free. It recently unveiled a language processor AI called ChatGPT, which made waves by its ability to compose complex text, including essays, opinions, and even poetry and jokes.

The trouble is, Musk explained, that the human ability to input commands into a computer is too slow to even go "along for the ride" with a powerful AI.

"If you're interacting with a phone it's limited by the speed

at which you can move your thumbs or the speed [at] which you can talk into your phone," he said during the Neuralink presentation.

"This is an extremely low data rate, maybe it's like 10, optimistically 100 bits per second. But a computer can communicate at gigabits, terabits per second, so this is the fundamental limitation that I think we need to address to mitigate the long-term risk of artificial intelligence and also just go along for the ride."

Yet there's no evidence that the implants would meaningfully close the speed gap between a human and a computer. People

are still limited by the pace at which they can form thoughts and make decisions.

Previous research has indicated that the brain can't process decisions faster than perhaps 100 bits per second. Reaction time measurements suggest that people can only make a handful of decisions per second and the rate drops as the complexity of the decisions increases.

Muscle response time is a bit of a drag, but generally the speed of the body seems a good match for the speed of the brain.

"One can certainly imagine that there are certain circumstances where you could be faster with an implant, but ... overall the body is optimized to be a very, very good output device," Churchland said.

Taking Musk's reasoning to its conclusion, wide adoption of brain-computer implants wouldn't solve potential dangers of AI, but rather open a way to totalitarian outcomes of unprecedented caliber, argued Michael Rectenwald, retired liberal arts professor at the New York University who has explored the consequences of government-Big Tech collusion in several books.

"The state already has used the pretext of a pandemic to abrogate rights and control the behavior of millions. What's to keep them from direct, remote control of human subjects?" he commented via email.

"It would amount to a bait-and-switch routine. The bait is the transhumanist promise of superhuman capacities and life extension. The switch is to an algorithmically controlled world with no autonomy, no liberty, and a virtual existence in a metaverse of their creation." ■

People walk in front of a Balenciaga ad in Beijing on Oct. 16, 2021. Balenciaga has apologized after receiving backlash for running an inappropriate ad campaign.



Normalizing pedophilia ultimately could lead to a major cultural change—elevating pedophilia to a protected class.

But in academic circles, some have begun to argue that pedophilia should be considered just another sexual orientation, not a mental disorder.

And a therapist who treats pedophiles told The Epoch Times that he believes pedophilia is on its way to becoming normalized.

‘Like Any Other Sexual Orientation’

In 2018, medical student Mirjam Heine, who said she had a background in psychology, gave a presentation called “Pedophilia is a Natural Sexual Orientation” during a TEDx event at the University of Würzburg in Germany. A program guide for TEDx said she was mainly guided by the works of professor Klaus Michael Beier, head of the Institute for Sexology and Sexual Medicine at the University Hospital Berlin and the prevention network “Kein Tater Werden.”

In her remarks, Heine said pedophilia is an “unchangeable sexual orientation,” just like heterosexuality.

“No one chooses to be a pedophile; no one can cease being one,” Heine argued during her talk. “The difference between pedophilia and other sexual orientations is that living out this sexual orientation will end in a disaster.”

Most countries in the world, including the United States, outlaw adults hav-

ing sexual contact or intercourse with children in most situations.

The term minor-attracted person grabbed headlines after professor Allyn Walker used it during a discussion on pedophiles in November 2021. Walker, a woman who transitioned to live as a man, was discussing her book: “A Long Dark Shadow: Minor-Attracted People and Their Pursuit of Dignity.”

In the interview with the ProStasia Foundation—a San Francisco organization focused on child sexual abuse—Walker said it’s less stigmatizing to use the term minor-attracted person than pedophile when referring to people “who don’t act on their urges to have sex with children.”

The interview drew fiery criticism. Within weeks, Walker resigned from her job as an assistant sociology and criminal justice professor at Old Dominion University in Virginia.

After stepping down, Walker said in a prepared statement that her research was “mischaracterized” by some in the media. Walker blamed the public outcry on intolerance for her transgender identity and said the research aimed to prevent child sexual abuse.

Later, Johns Hopkins University hired Walker to work at the Moore Center for Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse in Baltimore. Walker didn’t respond by press time to an Epoch ↪

CULTURE

THE PUSH TO NORMALIZE PEDOPHILIA

General public unaware of push to label pedophilia as a sexual orientation, counselor says

BY DARLENE MCCORMICK SANCHEZ

COLORADO MOM LYDIA LERMA feels as though she has been punched when she hears the trendy new term “minor-attracted person.” Just thinking of the damage a pedophile inflicted upon her son, who was 6 at the time, causes pain.

Creating a polite-sounding term for someone sexually attracted to children enrages her.

Any push to normalize pedophilia or designate it as another sexual orientation to be tolerated is “unconscionable,” Lerma told The Epoch Times.

“That’s a bunch of [expletive]!” she said of academics pushing acceptance of pedophilia.

“They are going to face the greatest resistance that they have ever seen. Society is not going to let that happen.”

FROM TOP: ANDREA VERDELLI/GETTY IMAGES, COURTESY OF LYDIA LERMA



Lydia Lerma of Colorado started a nonprofit that helps families hunt down fugitive pedophiles.

Times email through the Moore Center requesting comment.

Two former colleagues at Old Dominion defended Walker in the journal of the American Society of Criminology.

“Our friend and colleague, Dr. Allyn Walker, was the victim of a trolling attack on their research and their person that resulted in the loss of their position at Old Dominion University (ODU),” Ruth Triplett and Mona Danner wrote.

The attacks, they wrote, were “centering around misinformation and links to Dr. Walker’s identity as non-binary, transgender, and Jewish.”

Growing Cultural Acceptance

The fashion house Balenciaga faced backlash recently after running an ad campaign depicting little girls holding a teddy bear wearing bondage gear. One ad shows pages from a child pornography court ruling. Balenciaga later apologized for the advertisement.

A November headline from a Washington Post theater review reads: “‘Downstate’ is a play about pedophiles. It’s also brilliant.” The off-Broadway play characterizes pedophiles as complicated and troubled victims of harsh punishment.

Jon Uhler is a 30-year veteran counselor who has worked with sex offenders in the Pennsylvania and South Carolina prison systems. Throughout his career, he has assessed hundreds of pedophiles.

Uhler, a member of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA), said he’s afraid that pedophilia is on the road to normalization.

Sex offender treatment specialists are now trained to view sex offenders as victims of trauma, he said.

The idea is that pedophiles are reenacting their trauma by choosing a victim of the age they were when abused, Uhler said. But that’s not accurate, he noted.

Researchers are taking information from interviews with pedophiles and considering it to be true, instead of realizing that they’re dealing with the “world’s greatest deceivers,” Uhler said.

Even so, Walker’s ideas have permeated sex offender treatment circles, he said. Walker spoke at this year’s ATSA conference.

Creating a Protected Class

Normalizing pedophilia ultimately

could lead to a major cultural change—elevating pedophilia to a protected class.

“They are going to push to have it recognized as a sexual orientation, which would grant it civil rights status,” Uhler said.

If that happens, employers could no longer discriminate against pedophiles in areas such as employment, he said.

And if teens are given the legal right to decide if they want to have a sex-change operation or take hormones to try to appear as the other sex, that could help make it legal for pedophiles to act on their sexual urges, Uhler predicted.



“The culture is, in my view, descending into kind of a Dark Age.”

Scott Clark, minister

If children can legally decide what they can do with their bodies, then pedophiles could argue that they should be able to consent to a sexual relationship, he said.

Their interest “is ultimately lowering the age of consent.”

The general public doesn’t understand what’s happening, according to Uhler. It’s one of the defining issues of our time.

Scott Clark, a minister who teaches church history and historical theology at Westminster Seminary in California, has called the destigmatization of pedophilia the last stage of the “neo-pagan sexual revolution.”

Clark hosts the Heidelcast podcast and writes The Heidelblog. Both tackle religious and moral issues facing modern society.

“There’s a pretty obvious move to normalize pedophilia,” he said. “This invariably comes from adults. It’s not coming from children.”

Clark feels that researchers in academia are setting the final stage for a

society in which there are no police, no prisons, and no stigma for being sexually attracted to children.

“It all goes back to our lack of connection to nature,” he said. “Once nature is gone, we no longer have boundaries, and all things are possible.”

The first stage of the sexual revolution occurred with the introduction of feminism. The second came with the legalization of abortion, which coincided with more women moving into the workforce, according to Clark.

The third stage began in 2015, when the U.S. Supreme Court held in a 5–4 decision that the 14th Amendment required states to grant same-sex marriages.

Homosexuality had been considered a mental disorder until the American Psychiatric Association voted in 1973 to take it off the list. He said the decision was political, not scientific.

Pedophilia remains on the list of mental disorders, but Clark thinks it’s only a matter of time before the designation is removed.

“This is all just part of a long march to normalizing everything,” he said.

Like Uhler, Clark thinks the ultimate goal is to lower the age that a minor can consent to sex.

“The culture is, in my view, descending into kind of a Dark Age,” Clark said.

Moving Toward Decriminalizing Pedophilia

Florida attorney Jeff Childers, who has fought against mask mandates and helped parents oppose sexualization in schools, said looking back at how homosexuality became recognized as an orientation may offer insight into what could happen.

Once homosexuality became normalized, it led to the repeal of sodomy laws, Childers noted.

“That’s how it went for homosexuality. I will bet you a steak dinner the pedophiles have observed how it went for gay people,” he said.

So if pedophiles gain sexual-orientation status, they could work on decriminalizing sex between minors and adults, he said.

But there’s a significant difference between sodomy laws and sex offender laws, meaning that it would be much tougher to weaken them, according to



Florida attorney Jeff Childers in his Gainesville office on Oct. 12, 2021.

Childers. One of the arguments used to strike down sodomy laws was that they were antiquated and not often used. That can’t be said for child sexual assault laws.

He said there appears to be an erosion of the penalty for pedophilia in California. He referenced a Daily Mail exposé that showed that thousands of convicted pedophiles in California are being released from prison less than a year after being convicted of rape, sodomy, and sexual abuse of children younger than 14.

California’s Senate Bill 145, passed in 2020, expanded a law allowing judges discretion when considering whether those engaged in gay sex with minors should register as sex offenders.

In a previous bill passed in California in 1944, judges were allowed to make this call but only when the crime involved vaginal sex with a minor. Judges have always had the authority to exclude a person from registering if he or she isn’t more than 10 years older than the minor.

So under the law, a 24-year-old having sex with a 14-year-old might avoid be-

ing placed on the sex offender registry under statutory rape laws.

“The notion that a 14-year-old could consent to sexual relations with an adult is irrational,” Childers said. “That 14-year-old can’t vote. Of course, they can’t drink until they’re 21.”

People must fight the issue of normalizing pedophilia at every juncture, Childers said. Or suddenly it could become legal.

No Gentle Words

Lerma’s quest for justice for her son made headlines in 2018 after she successfully hunted down his abuser, Andrew Vanderwal, a man who had access to the child while living at her ex-husband’s home. After he was arrested and released from jail on bail, he disappeared.

On a tip, Lerma traveled to Mexico and found him in a grocery store parking lot. Her success in locating Vanderwal led to his arrest and conviction for molesting her son and another child.

She remembers trembling when she

spotted him in Ciudad Cuauhtémoc from her rental car.

“It was this absolute rage and like I could get out and kill him,” Lerma said.

It would be wrong to use gentle words to describe the man who wounded her son so profoundly, she said.

And even if pedophiles have been sexually molested, that doesn’t give them permission to prey on children, according to Lerma. She was a victim of sexual abuse in her youth but didn’t become an offender, she said.

Now, in her work with the Lydia Lerma Foundation, she helps parents hunt down perpetrators running from justice. And she uses professional and social networks to circulate images of fugitives she’s tracking worldwide.

Pedophilia shouldn’t be considered a sexual orientation, because it involves an unequal power dynamic between a child and an adult, Lerma said.

“It’s an abusive situation,” she said. “There’s no equality there. There’s no consent there. I don’t care how they try to spin it.” ■

PHOTO COURTESY OF SCOTT CLARK, AMBER DORN FOR THE EPOCH TIMES

The CDC has removed the statistics indicating a “range of 60,000 to 2.5 million defensive gun uses each year” in the United States from its webpage.

PHOTO BY DANIEL RAMALHO/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

REMOVAL OF KEY STATISTIC CAME AFTER PRESSURE CAMPAIGN FROM ACTIVISTS



2ND AMENDMENT

Emails Reveal CDC Removed Data on Defensive Gun Use

BY ZACHARY STIEBER

THE U.S. CENTERS FOR Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) removed data on guns from its website after holding a private meeting with gun control activists, according to newly disclosed emails.

The CDC webpage “Fast Facts: Firearm Violence Prevention” includes a portion on defensive gun use, or instances when people use guns for defensive purposes.

The portion defines defensive gun use and originally stated: “Estimates of defensive gun use vary depending on the questions asked, populations studied, timeframe, and other factors related to the design of studies. The report Priorities for Research to Reduce the Threat of Firearm-Related Violence indicates a range of 60,000 to 2.5 million defensive gun uses each year.”

The page now reads: “Estimates of defensive gun use vary depending on the questions asked, populations studied, timeframe, and other factors related to study design. Given the wide variability in estimates, additional research is necessary to understand defensive gun use prevalence, frequency, circumstances, and outcomes.”

The change happened because of pressure from activists, the emails show.

Several weeks after the page was published in 2021, Devin Hughes, president and founder of GVPedia, emailed the CDC expressing concern about the 2.5 million estimate.

Hughes said the figure stemmed from surveys that have “fatal flaws” and that the figure comes from a report that was published in 2013, before the Gun Violence Archive began providing data. That archive only estimates about 2,000 defensive gun use instances per year. He urged the CDC to “revisit and update” the defensive gun use portion of the webpage.

Hughes apparently didn’t receive a response, so he forwarded his message to Po Murray, chairwoman of the Newtown Action Alliance. Murray sent the message to White House officials.

Hannah Bristol, with the White House Office of Public Engagement, answered

after consulting with the CDC.

“CDC reviewed many studies for the estimates used for this range in the fact sheet and an update is not warranted at this time,” Bristol said.

Internally, Linda Dahlberg with the CDC also said the criticism didn’t hold weight. “We stand behind our fact sheet, which essentially points out that estimates of defensive gun use vary depending on the data source, questions asked, populations studied, timeframes, and other factors related to the design of studies,” Dahlberg said.

She listed 13 data sources.

Hughes responded by saying that he disagreed that the Gun Violence Archive only represents a small subset of people who used guns defensively.

“I would strongly urge the CDC to consider revising the factsheet to add further context, or at the very least removing the DGU section until better data emerges,” he wrote. “I would be more than happy to meet virtually to further discuss the

research surrounding DGUs and how best to correct the misinformation in the Factsheet.”

That led to a meeting involving Hughes; Murray; Mark Bryant, executive director of the Gun Violence Archive; and three top CDC officials: Dr. Deb Houry, the CDC’s acting principal deputy director; Thomas Simon, associate director of science for the CDC’s Division of Violence Prevention; and Elizabeth Reimels, associate director for policy, partnerships, and strategic communication at the division.

The meeting took place on Sept. 15, 2021, and lasted about 30 minutes.

The emails were obtained by Konstantinos Moros, a lawyer representing the California Rifle & Pistol Association, through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request and reviewed by The Epoch Times. They were first reported by The Reload.

Emails After the Meeting

Exactly what unfolded in the meeting isn’t clear. But emails afterward

The CDC stated that it came to determine that the initially listed range of DGUs was ‘not easily understandable and may be outdated.’



A sign of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta on April 23, 2020.

indicate that the activists made their case.

“Thank you for taking the time to meet with us. We deeply appreciate it,” Hughes wrote afterward.

He said he showed slides during the meeting that detailed problems with the defensive gun use estimate, particularly the estimate of up to 2.5 million uses per year. The slides weren’t included in the documents, some of which were redacted.

Hughes also said he hoped that “this is the beginning of the conversation.”

“Thank you for sharing this,” Simon responded. “We also appreciate the opportunity to talk with you, Po, and Mark and the time that you put into the summary you provided.”

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SOURCES

INITIALLY, CDC LISTED 13

data sources as backup for their data estimates of defensive gun use.

Bryant, in an email to the CDC, acknowledged that the defensive use instances logged by Gun Violence Archive, which Hughes had cited, are an undercount “because there is a propensity to just not report incidents that don’t have someone shot or killed” but said that the 2.5 million instances per year had been “debunked repeatedly,” pointing to a blog post by the Virginia Center for Public Safety and a blog post that responded to a 2015 op-ed by Gary Kleck.

Kleck, a professor emeritus at Florida State University’s College of Criminology & Criminal Justice, is behind the 2.5 million figure.

He told The Epoch Times via email that he has “systematically rebutted every single criticism” of the higher defensive gun use (DGU) estimates, pointing to the op-ed, and said that “critics have simply ignored the rebuttals.”

“Virtually all flaws in surveys known to scholars work to produce underestimates of the frequency of crime-related experiences, so the notion that DGU is

overestimated at all, never mind grossly overestimated, is wildly out of line with scholarly knowledge of survey research,” Kleck said.

As he has noted, CDC surveys from the late 1990s—defensive gun use questions haven’t been included since—estimated about 1.1 million defensive gun use incidents per year. One of his most recent papers, going over the CDC survey results, also examined approximately 18 other surveys and found an estimate of 500,000 to 5.2 million DGUs per year.

A CDC spokesperson told The Epoch Times via email: “Science leads all CDC decisions. Our goal is to present the science and the data objectively and in language that is easy to understand.”

The CDC stated that it came to determine that the initially listed range of DGUs was “not easily understandable and may be outdated.”

“CDC removed both numbers—the low and high estimates—from the fact sheet and acknowledged that additional research is necessary to understand defensive gun use prevalence, frequency, circumstances, and outcomes,” the spokesperson said. “CDC does not advocate for or against gun policies. CDC engages with a wide variety of partners every day. It is not unusual for partners to be connected to the agency through members of Congress or the White House. In the past year alone, CDC has met with a number of organizations interested in the topic of firearm injury and violence prevention—including gun rights organizations, gun violence prevention organizations, public health organizations, and medical societies.”

The FOIA request asked for all documents relating to the CDC’s decision to edit the gun fast facts page. None of the documents that were returned showed any meetings or discussion with gun rights groups or anybody outside of the gun control activists.

Houry and Simon didn’t respond by press time to requests by The Epoch Times for comment. Reimels declined to comment.

Some CDC officials didn’t know why a change would be needed.



A family examines pistols at the National Rifle Association of America’s annual meeting at the Kentucky Exposition Center in Louisville, Ky., in this file photo.

“I mean all we say on the fact sheet essentially is that you get different estimates of defensive gun use depending on the methods you use to measure it and then point to the National Academy report,” James Mercey, director of the Division of Violence Prevention, wrote to Reimels. “Hard to argue against that. What do you think the concern is with this? Or is it something else?”

Reimels later told Hughes, Bryant, and Murray that the CDC was planning to update the fact sheet in early 2022 “after the release of some new data.”

“We will also make some edits to the content we discussed that I think will address the concerns you and other partners have raised,” she said.

The webpage was changed in May, The Trace reported.

No reason was given publicly for the change.

Simon told a colleague in one of the newly disclosed emails that the CDC had “simplified the text” for defensive gun

use, noting that the original text “provided an estimate” of the annual instances.

“I initially submitted this FOIA request back in June because I was suspicious of the CDC’s motivation for editing their website as to defensive gun use survey statistics,” Moros told The Epoch Times via email. “The fact that the changes resulted from an extensive pressure campaign by anti-gun advocates is disappointing but not surprising. When people ask why the gun rights community is skeptical of more funding to the CDC to research gun crime, I hope they remember this incident. The CDC has sadly become too politicized to be trusted.”

Activists

Hughes and Murray advocate for stricter gun laws.

Both Hughes and GVPedia have promoted gun control legislation. The

Newtown Action Alliance wants to ban so-called assault weapons, cut gun manufacturers off from insurance, and stop members of Congress from carrying guns on U.S. Capitol grounds.

“If you don’t support an assault weapons ban then you support arming mass shooters,” Murray said in a statement on social media.

Kleck told The Epoch Times that high DGU estimates don’t threaten “moderate gun control measures like background checks, which only restrict guns among small high-risk subsets of the population like convicted criminals.”

“High DGU estimates, on the other hand, would present serious problems for those who support prohibitionist measures that would disarm all or most civilians, since such estimates would imply serious costs to disarming all or most prospective crime victims,” he said.

Bryant says he and the Gun Violence Archive don’t advocate for stricter legislation. The archive states that its mission is “to document incidents of gun violence and gun crime nationally to provide independent, verified data to those who need to use it in their research, advocacy or writing.”

But Bryant described himself as part of the “GVP community” in his email to the CDC. GVP stands for gun violence prevention.

“Until proof [is] available, we in the GVP community respectfully request that this outlier that has been used so often to stop legislation be removed until a panel can build a fair survey which will better reflect the true status of the number of [DGUs],” he wrote.

“I had no specific legislation, federal or state, in mind when I talked about that,” Bryant told The Epoch Times via email. “It was a reference to blocking communications that advocates have with legislators. I am not part of those conversations, just observing them from our research group as some use our data.”

Bryant, a gun owner, said the gun violence protection community is made up of different sorts of people, including journalists and gun rights activists.

“What we asked of the CDC was regarding the use of statistics that could not be proven. We asked them to fund a study to come up with an accurate number or remove the inaccurate numbers as they were misleading. They chose to remove that sentence in the fast facts,” he said. ■



Newtown Action Alliance Chairwoman Po Murray at an event to demand that Congress renew an assault weapons ban at the U.S. Capitol in Washington on July 12, 2016.

TRANSGENDERISM

Transgender Youth and the Placebo Effect

Researcher cites ‘perfect storm’ for placebo effect in transgender treatments

By Janice Hisle

“A PERFECT STORM” OF factors may have distorted research that’s popularizing “gender-affirming treatments,” according to an Australian researcher.

In a new scholarly article that cites more than 100 references, Alison Clayton said expectations of positive results could have influenced studies about hormones and surgeries for gender-questioning youths.

This placebo effect—rather than the treatments themselves—may have caused patients to see improved mental health and quality of life, she wrote in an article that the Archives of Sexual Behavior published in November 2022.

“Placebo-induced improvements are real and can be robust and long-lasting,” wrote Clayton, a practicing psychiatrist.

She thinks a combination of unusual factors created “a perfect storm environment” that may have nurtured the placebo effect in gender medicine research.

She also warned that failing to isolate the placebo effect can render medicine “little different from pseudoscience and the quackery that dominated medicine of past times.”

While the placebo effect is widely discussed in some areas of medicine, such as the use of antidepressants, it appears to be “not considered at all” in the realm of “gender-affirming treatment,” Clayton wrote.

Clayton’s article adds to a mounting pile of concerns about the way doctors have treated transgender minors across the globe in recent years.



‘Placebo’ can also refer to the complex changes that occur in a person’s body and mind as they think about the treatments they’re receiving.

Researcher Commended

Peers at the Society for Evidence-Based Gender Medicine (SEGM), an international group of more than 100 clinicians and researchers, discussed Clayton’s placebo effect article in an essay posted on Dec. 7, 2022.

SEGM commended her for being “a powerful, sober voice in the increasingly heated debates in gender medicine.”

Clayton has explored “misadventures in medicine,” such as brain-altering lobotomies on psychiatric patients, SEGM stated. She found “troubling parallels between those eschewed practices of the past and the currently-celebrated practice of offering mastectomies to

gender-distressed female minors,” according to the researchers.

Although “every systematic review” has concluded that studies of transgender-identifying youths suffer from low-quality evidence, Clayton’s article is “the first to call out the likely placebo effect,” SEGM wrote in a Dec. 8, 2022, tweet.

Beyond Sugar Pills

When most people hear “placebo,” they think of a sugar pill that contains no medication. While that’s true, the term, “placebo” can also refer to the complex changes that occur in a person’s body and mind as they think about the treatments they’re receiving.

The prestige, status, and authority of doctors and therapists “help engender patients’ trust and expectations of relief from suffering,” Clayton wrote. Such thoughts and feelings can trigger changes in a person’s body chemistry, activation of some regions of the brain, and improve a sense of well-being, “all of which may contribute to patients’

Well-designed studies aim to minimize factors that can skew a study, such as bias and the placebo effect. This enables researchers to more confidently determine that the studied treatment is causing the observed effects.

Some people may wonder: “If the patient improves, does it really matter why? Yes, it does, particularly for treatments that have significant risk of adverse effects,” Clayton wrote.

And perils do come along with “gender-affirming treatments,” she noted.

Transgender hormonal and surgical treatments may jeopardize or eliminate young patients’ ability to become parents.

Several studies challenge “the widespread assumption that many transgender people do not want to have biological children,” Clayton said.

Hormonal treatments also might increase the risk of cardiovascular problems, certain cancers, brittle bones, and memory impairment.

Given these possible severe and irreversible effects, strong evidence is needed to prove that the treatments improve mental health as claimed and “that there are no less-harmful alternatives,” Clayton wrote.

That evidence doesn’t currently exist in research, she said.

A ‘Perfect Storm’

Clayton outlined the factors that make “gender-affirming treatment” particularly vulnerable to the placebo effect.

During the past decade, there has been an unexplained, rapid increase in youths reporting distress over gender, a condition that can’t be diagnosed with an objective test.

At the same time, “the previous ‘common practice’ of providing psychosocial care only to those under 18 or 21 years ... has largely been replaced by the gender affirmative treatment approach,” Clayton wrote.

Some clinicians at prestigious institutions “enthusiastically promote” these treatments with the help of media, social media, and “celebrity patients,” she said.

“There is intense media and social media coverage of ‘trans youth’ issues,” Clayton wrote, saying that some surgeons target adolescents in their social media promotions.

Some gender clinics may condemn attempts to criticize the procedures and try to squelch any media coverage that is less than “celebratory,” she said.

Then, these advocates may “make overstated claims about the strength of evidence and the certainty of benefits ... including an emphasis on their ‘life-saving’ qualities and under-acknowledge the risks.”

“There is no robust empirical evidence that puberty blockers reduce suicidality or suicide rates,” she wrote.

Clayton said she worries that too much emphasis on the “exaggerated suicide risk narrative” can create a self-fulfilling prophecy: “Suicidality in these vulnerable youths may be further exacerbated.”

On top of that, alternative treatments, such as psychotherapy, “are sometimes denigrated as harmful ... or as ‘doing nothing.’”

“Placebo-induced improvements are real and can be robust and long-lasting.”

Alison Clayton, researcher

What Can Be Done?

“There are no easy solutions to the complex research and clinical issues,” Clayton wrote.

But she thinks a good first step would be increased “awareness and debate” among professionals, notations of placebo effects in research papers, and improved studies conducted by more impartial researchers.

She also recommended that clinicians “make measured and honest statements to patients, families, policymakers, and the public about the evidence” regarding “gender-affirming treatments.”

Clayton called upon the media and clinicians to tell stories of patients who have decided to not transition or have delayed their transition until adulthood, “along with accounts of patients who have benefitted from ethical psychological approaches; and accounts of those who have had negative transition experiences.” ■



(Top) Parents and supporters protest the Fairfax County School District’s pro-transgender policies and “gender-affirming care” outside a Fairfax County School Board meeting in Falls Church, Va., on Nov. 3, 2022. (Above) A testosterone ampoule.

clinical improvement,” she said.

Other study participants, views on social media, and news media reports can also influence study participants.

“Anything that increases patients’ expectations is potentially capable of boosting placebo effects,” Clayton wrote.

FROM TOP: TERRILL/THE EPOCH TIMES; CLAUDIO REYES/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

ECONOMY

Recession Coming in 2024: Economic Forecaster

Economist Patrick Luce says the Fed pushed 'too hard too fast' in 2022

By Petr Svab

THE U.S. ECONOMY WILL slow this year, then fall into a recession next year, according to ITR Economics, an economic forecaster. “We’re still calling for more of a slowing growth cycle in 2023, but the original soft landing that we were calling around the end of 2023 now looks like it’s turning into a hard landing in 2024,” Patrick Luce, an economist with ITR, told The Epoch Times.

A key indicator that made ITR change its forecast is the inversion of Treasury rates.

In July 2022, the 10-year Treasury yield sank below the two-year yield and the inversion has been growing since. Such an inversion signals that investors are wary of the economic situation in the next few years and it historically tends to happen 12 to 18 months before a recession.

Luce blamed the bleak outlook on the Federal Reserve’s aggressive raising of interest rates in 2022, from virtually zero in March 2022 to more than 4 percent now.

“We see this year that the Fed pushes too hard too fast,” he said.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell has been saying for months that rates need to stay higher for longer in order to tame inflation.

Inflation escalated from less than 2 percent in early 2021 to more than 9 percent in June 2022. It has since moderated to 7.1 percent in November 2022.

The increase has been attributed to several factors, primarily the massive government spending during the

COVID-19 pandemic, as well as supply chain disruptions caused by lockdowns that were instituted in response to it.

The combination of the two factors “bottlenecked the system,” Luce said.

Other issues cited by some experts as affecting price inflation have been the restrictive domestic energy policy of the Biden administration and the war in Ukraine.

Powell has stressed that the Fed has little power over the supply side of the economy but that he can try to close the production–consumption gap by taming demand.

The problem is, by the time the Fed is satisfied that inflation has been quelled, it may have already tightened the monetary policy too much.

“These impacts, they don’t happen overnight,” Luce said. “They take time to manifest themselves in the broader, macro-economic sense.”

Effects Lagging Behind

In its analysis, ITR likens the economy to a train. The cars in the front see the effects of what’s to come first, while the rear cars are responding with a lag to trends already well underway in the economy.

“The financial sector leads the economy. Housing market, specifically single-unit housing, leads the economy,” Luce said.

Then come indicators such as new orders and industrial production. Further down the line is wholesale trade and then retail. At the rear of the train are consumer prices, which is exactly the indicator the Fed is trying to influence, Luce pointed out.



In the housing sector, the upcoming recession is already evident, he noted.

Higher interest rates immediately throttle lending, which then quickly hits the housing sector, which is sensitive to mortgage rate movements.

Housing permit issuance was down about 11 percent year-over-year in October 2022, leading ITR to consider the sector already in recession.

“That contraction is already underway,” Luce said.

“It’s our expectation for that to continue throughout [2023] and even into the first quarter of 2024.”

Yet he doesn’t expect the sector to get pummeled as in the Great Recession of 2008.

“Inventories are much lower today than they were back in 2005–2006 as they were leading up into the Great Recession,” he said.

Meanwhile, homeowner vacancy rates are low, homeowner occupancy rates are high, and people seem to still have enough income to pay their mortgages.

“The consumer’s ability to service debt right now and household ability to service

debt right now is very strong,” Luce said.

What’s weighing housing down are very high prices.

ITR is expecting the Fed to get rates up to about 5 percent and then end the increases around March to May.

“As that federal funds rate peaks and if they start to bring it back down, that will also give easing to that affordability situation within the housing market,” Luce said.

He noted that the housing market particularly depends on locality, meaning some areas will likely see major slumps while others perhaps just a mere slowdown.

Recession in Tech

Tech is another sector that will see the recession arrive early, ITR predicts.

The industry was “stimulated over trend” during the pandemic and is therefore “more susceptible to the pull-back in kind of that post-COVID era,” Luce said.

The rest of the economy is likely to sink into a recession in early 2024, albeit a relatively shallow one, ITR expects.

From a GDP perspective, the recession

may resemble the “flat and bouncy” one of 2000 to 2001, Luce said.

From an industrial production perspective, it’d be close to the recession of the late 1960s or early 1990s.

“Definitely more mild than what we saw during the Great Recession,” he said.

The recession wouldn’t cause deflation, he said, but rather “a temporary reprieve” in inflation.

For the rest of the decade, ITR expects inflation to remain elevated. Americans are getting older on average, which means a shrinking labor pool and upward pressure on wages. In addition, many people who were working despite retirement age during the pandemic have called it quits and don’t seem to be coming back.

“When I look at the labor force participation rate, the majority of demographics are back on trend, but folks over the age of 65, especially, haven’t gotten back to that participation rate from the COVID era,” Luce said.

Moreover, the pandemic and lockdown woes have prompted an “onshoring trend” of companies reducing dependency on foreign supplies and bringing



(Left) New homes under construction in Trappe, Md., on Oct. 28, 2022.

(Above) A “for sale” sign hangs in front of a home in Miami on June 21, 2022.

production to the United States. That also boosts domestic labor demand.

A shift toward higher inventory levels to bridge over potential supply disruptions is also inflationary because it kills some capital productivity.

“Those trends are real and we’re feeling them,” Luce said.

If the Fed insists on its mandate to keep inflation at around 2 percent, it may run into “structural” factors “providing more inflationary pressures above that 2 percent level,” he said.

The ITR forecast assumes that the job market will remain “strong enough to support ongoing real income growth” and that food prices will “moderate or come down,” Luce said.

Another caveat is that ITR bases its forecasts on market forces—it doesn’t try to guess what the government may do, for example, in response to a recession. ■



A consumer shops at a supermarket in New York on Dec. 14, 2022.

LOOKWISE FROM TOP: L. JIM WATSON/AFP/VIAGETTY IMAGES; JOE RADE/GETTY IMAGES; YUKI IWAMURA/AFP/VIAGETTY IMAGES



The 2020 COVID-19 outbreak and its accompanying slate of federal pandemic-related bills were “unprecedented,” an expert says.

EXPANDING WELFARE

Pandemic Aid Used for Guaranteed Income

82 cities, counties using federal pandemic relief money for guaranteed income programs

By John Haughey

THERE ARE AT LEAST 82 U.S. municipalities across 29 states now engaged in guaranteed income experiments, including more than 70 with pilot programs created within the past year, according to a coalition of more than 100 mayors promoting the concept.

Mayors for a Guaranteed Income and proponents among municipal officials nationwide are encouraging local governments to seed pilot programs with federal pandemic assistance from a \$350 billion fund for state and local governments within the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), adopted in March 2021.

The mayoral group was established by Michael Tubbs, former mayor of Stockton, California, in June 2020 after the city began and later extended an experiment in which 125 residents received \$500 monthly in a program financed by the Economic Security Project, a nonprofit that supports guaranteed income experiments.

During a Dec. 15, 2022, virtual roundtable discussion, several municipal officials said there’s growing public support for basic income models and accelerating momentum to expand these programs through a mix of federal, state, local, and private money.

In fact, much to the chagrin of conservatives and budget hawks, the ARPA state and local recovery fund is being used “as a seed for long-term policy

change,” according to DePaul University’s Amanda Kass, who studies how states, cities, and counties spend federal pandemic assistance.

Kass told the panel that ARPA is the first federal program “that has ever produced this amount of highly flexible aid to nearly all governments in the United States—to tens of thousands of governments.”

As a result, she said, because of “the unprecedented nature” of the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak and its accompanying slate of federal pandemic-related bills, local governments are spending ARPA money in innovative ways, which makes evaluating how they spent or plan to spend that money “a tricky question.”

Kass said in analyzing how local governments are dispersing ARPA allocations, there’s “not just one avenue” but “many different stories” in how cities and counties “with unique socio-economic conditions” are using the money to address “unique needs.”

Guaranteed Income Programs Gaining Traction

Baltimore is sponsoring a guaranteed income pilot program in which 200 “18- to

24-year-olds who have children” receive \$1,000 per month in supplemental income for two years, according to the city’s Chief Recovery Officer Shamiah Kerney.

The city hopes to collect enough data to determine if providing a guaranteed basic income for low-income families with children benefits recipients and taxpayers, she said.

“We’re hoping that will inform the dialogue on a national basis,” Kerney said during the roundtable, cohosted by the National League of Cities and the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee (PRAC), a watchdog panel created by the U.S. Office of Inspector General (OIG) to monitor federal pandemic allocations.

The Baltimore Young Families Success Fund has earmarked \$4.8 million in ARPA money for the program. It began dispersing \$1,000 per month to 200 recipients with incomes at or below 300 percent of the federal poverty level—\$26,200 for a family of four—in August.

By fall 2024, according to Kerney, the city suspects data collected from the pilot program will “demonstrate the need” for sustaining, if not expanding, the program.

In Cook County, Illinois, which includes Chicago, the board of supervisors in September approved the nation’s largest guaranteed income pilot program, a \$42 million plan mostly using ARPA money to provide \$500 monthly to 3,250 households at or below the federal poverty line for two years.

Cook County Budget Director Annette Guzman said officials are looking at the program to determine if it should be “a permanent piece” in addressing poverty “going forward.”

On Dec. 13, the St. Louis Board of Aldermen, in a 21–1 vote, set aside \$5 million in ARPA money for a test universal basic income program that will provide 440 families with \$500 per month for 18 months.

St. Louis Senior Strategic Initiatives

Manager Grace Kyung said the city has already dispersed more than \$122 million in ARPA money for direct cash assistance programs, mostly related to housing needs, so the \$5 million test program could prove to be a good investment.

The pilot program fits under the city’s “economic justice action plan,” she said, which dovetails with U.S. Treasury ARPA guidelines that “encourage” funding for programs that address “racial and economic inequities” predating, but aggravated by, the pandemic.

Under U.S. Treasury guidelines attached to ARPA state and local allocations “investments to support people or communities with low incomes are allowable” even if initial ARPA outlays “may require investments for an extended period to be successful.”

Using this framework, local governments have secured ARPA money for programs related to community violence mitigation, behavioral health, affordable housing, child care, eviction prevention, medical debt, and cash assistance.

More Than \$220 Billion Still Available

According to PRAC, a team of 21 OIG inspectors general who monitor the disbursement of \$5.7 trillion in federal aid approved between March 2020 and March 2021—beginning with the \$2.2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and concluding with ARPA—there’s still plenty of pandemic assistance money available to municipalities.

As of Dec. 15, PRAC’s dashboard documents that \$127.6 billion of ARPA’s State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund had been “obligated” with \$93 billion spent.

More than 27,300 cities, counties, and special districts nationwide have tapped into the ARPA fund thus far, PRAC reported.

The most common use of ARPA money identified by PRAC is “revenue

replacement,” which more than 24,000 local governments accessed to compensate for revenue declines fostered by the pandemic necessary to stabilize budgets.

But PRAC has documented that much of the \$127.6 billion has been “obligated” to a wide variety of programs related to public health, infrastructure, administration, and “premium pay” with more than 6,800 allocations to address “negative economic impacts” aggravated by the pandemic.

According to PRAC, as of Dec. 15, more than \$477 million in state and local ARPA money has been spent on cash assistance to 26 million Americans through existing programs, such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and Community Development Service Block Grants (CDBG), as well as through the growing number of pilot guaranteed income programs proposed by Mayors for a Guaranteed Income.

That leaves more than \$220 billion in ARPA state and local fund money that must be “obligated” by Dec. 31, 2024, and spent by Dec. 31, 2026.

Guaranteed income pilot programs will increasingly be part of that mix, Cook County’s Guzman said, calling ARPA “an unprecedented opportunity” for local governments “to go to a completely different level” in addressing “historical inequities with transformative programs that would help people recover from the pandemic.” ■



Local governments are spending ARPA money in innovative ways, an expert says.

\$220 BILLION

MORE THAN \$220 billion in ARPA state and local fund money are left that must be ‘obligated’ by Dec. 31, 2024, and spent by Dec. 31, 2026.

\$42 MILLION

IN COOK COUNTY, Ill., which includes Chicago, the board of supervisors has approved the nation’s largest guaranteed income pilot program, a \$42 million plan mostly using ARPA money.

FROM L. SPENGLER PLATT/GETTY IMAGES; MARK WILSON/GETTY IMAGES

SPOTLIGHT

Stepping Into a New Year

A MAN TRAVELS ON A DONKEY CART
against the backdrop of the last sunset of
2022, in Lahore, Pakistan, on Dec. 31, 2022.

PHOTO BY ARIF ALI/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



Push to get projects underway slowed by new federal rules and regulations still undefined



INFRASTRUCTURE

STATES FACE PRESSURE TO SPEND ON INFRASTRUCTURE

BY JOHN HAUGHEY

The Brent Spence Bridge spans the Ohio River on the Ohio-Kentucky border in Cincinnati, Ohio, on April 2, 2021.

PHOTO BY JEFF DEAN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN VISITED Covington, Kentucky, on Jan. 4 to tout the launch of an Ohio River bridge project that will receive a \$1.64 billion federal funding boost from the \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) adopted by Congress in November 2021.

Biden was joined by Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), Kentucky’s Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear, and Ohio’s Republican Gov. Mike DeWine at a ceremony to commemorate the U.S. Department of Transportation’s (DOT’s) approval of the IIJA allocation for the Brent Spence Bridge Corridor Project.

The 60-year-old Brent Spence Bridge is a double-decked, cantilevered bridge that carries traffic on Interstate 71 and Interstate 75 across the river between the Cincinnati metropolitan area and northern Kentucky.

The overall \$3.6 billion project, jointly managed by the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet and the Ohio Department of Transportation, will improve the existing span and build a new “companion bridge.” Construction is set to break ground by late 2023 and be completed by 2029.

Both states had sought federal funding for a new bridge for years.

“This project will not only ease the traffic nightmare that drivers have suffered through for years, but it will also help ensure that the movement of the supply chain doesn’t stall on this nationally significant corridor,” DeWine, reelected to a second term in November, said in a statement.

According to a Jan. 1 White House statement, Biden sought to use his visit to the Ohio River to tout how the IIJA, also referred to as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, will leverage federal money with state and local funds to fuel an “infrastructure decade” across the country.

As state legislatures nationwide prepare for 2023 sessions—45 convene in January, including 35 by Jan. 11—allocating federal IIJA funds for often long-planned infrastructure projects will be among the top issues discussed by lawmakers.

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), National Association of Homebuilders, and Associated General Contractors of America (AGCA) are among industry groups lobbying state lawmakers to act quickly in allocating the federal funds to get projects moving.

‘Get Projects Done’

ASCE President Maria Lehman told The Epoch Times that her organization is encouraging lawmakers to “get it in, get projects done. The potholes aren’t waiting; the bad bridges aren’t

waiting. It is possible to move projects quickly. [State lawmakers] have to embrace” the federal funding and “proactively push” money into projects that, in many instances, have been on the books for years.

Time is of the essence, according to Lehman. “That’s one of the things I’m saying. If we don’t spend this on the right projects” now, costs will only mount later, she said.

“We have been underfunding infrastructure for a long time,” Lehman said, noting that federal and state lawmakers’ “independent failure to act” on needed projects has fostered a \$12.6 trillion national backlog in infrastructure funding.

State legislature 2023 sessions will be the second round in which lawmakers will be allocating IIJA monies since the bill’s November 2021 adoption. Federal agencies “have been delivering, [but] the states have been slow in getting [money] out the door quickly enough,” she said.

“States that have passed their own revenue streams,” such as the 40 states that have raised gas taxes since 2020, “are ahead in infrastructure development,” Lehman said, praising metropolitan planning agencies across the country for having plans and state and local match money available to quickly move on projects.

Agencies ‘Contributing’ to Delays

AGCA spokesman Brian Turmail told The Epoch Times that federal agencies are contributing to infrastructure allocation delays.

“The biggest challenge that we see, this follows from the federal level down to the states, continues to be confusion and uncertainty in how each federal agency will interpret the new rules and regulations in the infrastructure bill,” he said, pointing to changes in the “longstanding Buy American program” among bottlenecks.

“Among the issues is determining [if] any manufactured components must be entirely sourced and assembled in the United States. What is a manufactured product? The administration has not clarified those [terms] but has already required federal agencies to enforce ‘Buy American’ requirements.”

The undefined devil is the details, according to Turmail.

“There is a lot of confusion on how to proceed,” he said. “Do we allow this water system to go through knowing there are components not made in the USA?”

That “confusion equals inaction,” Turmail said, noting another issue in moving forward with projects is that “permitting reform is supposedly part of the bill.”

“The legislation ... codified what the Trump administration did by executive order that



reduced the permitting process from years to months," he said.

"The administration is ignoring the right parts of the legislation and paying copious attention to the wrong parts and just pretending [permitting reform] is not in the bill. We need the federal government to move forward so states can apply [permitting reform to project approvals].

"We haven't seen any movement [regarding permitting reform]."

An October 2022 White House fact sheet offers a state-by-state review of what projects have thus far received IIJA allocations. The ASCE, which produces an Infrastructure Report Card every four years—most recently in 2021—also maintains an updated roster of state-by-state infrastructure projects charting priorities and needs.

According to the White House Infrastructure Implementation Team, more than \$185 billion in IIJA funding has thus far been allocated to more than 6,900 specific projects across 4,000 communities in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the territories, across dozens of categories ranging from roads and bridges to wildlife restoration to broadband expansion. A brief roundup of highlights includes the following.

Roads and Bridges: According to the U.S. DOT and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) approximately \$120 billion in IIJA has been earmarked for more than 2,800 bridge projects, including the Brent Spence Bridge Project in Ohio-Kentucky.

Other significant road and bridge projects in-

(Top left) A welder works on an overpass on the Irving Interchange infrastructure project at the site of the former Texas Stadium in Irving, Texas, on Aug. 10, 2022.

(Above left) An aerial view of John F. Kennedy International Airport in the Queens borough of New York, in this file photo.

(Top right) A passenger waits to board an "L" train at a subway station in Chicago on Nov. 9, 2021.

(Above right) An electric vehicle charging station in Los Angeles on May 18, 2021.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JOHN MOORE/GETTY IMAGES, SCOTT OLSON/GETTY IMAGES, FREDERIC J. BROWN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES, BRUCE BENNETT/GETTY IMAGES

clude the East River Tunnels in New York, the Connecticut River Bridge, and the Susquehanna River Bridge and Frederick Douglas Tunnel, both in Maryland.

Rail: According to the Federal Railroad Administration, the IIJA allocates \$66 billion in new funding for passenger and freight rail, including \$43.5 billion for Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Grants.

Among beneficiaries is the \$105 billion California High-Speed Rail project, which has been on the drawing board since California Gov. Jerry Brown lobbied for it in the 1980s.

California voters approved a \$10 billion funding measure in 2008. The project was launched in 2012, with lines being built in segments since 2015. The first section, planned to be operable by 2029, is in the San Joaquin Valley area of the Central Valley from Merced, California, to Bakersfield, California.

When completed, the 800-mile high-speed rail line will have 24 stations. Trains traveling up to 220 miles per hour will carry passengers between Los Angeles and San Francisco in two hours and 40 minutes.

Local Projects: According to the DOT, it has issued \$1.5 billion in IIJA allocations for 26 projects requested by local planning agencies and \$2.2 billion for 166 projects "that will allow urban and rural communities to move forward on projects that modernize roads, bridges, transit, rail, ports, and intermodal transportation and make our transportation systems safer, more accessible, more affordable, and more sustainable."

Public Transit: The DOT reported in October 2022 that it has allocated \$20.4 billion in transit funding and recommended \$4.45 billion in Capital Investment Grants "to advance public transit projects" in Arizona, California, Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, New York, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Washington.

Among the public transit programs tapping into IIJA funds to accelerate projects is CapMetro in Austin, Texas, which launched its \$7.1 billion Project Connect Texas in February 2022.

The massive project, which Austin voters approved in November 2020, will extend one existing MetroRail line; add two light rail lines, a bus rapid transit line, one commuter train line, and a tunnel below the center of the city; purchase an all-electric fleet of buses and trains; and build new park-and-ride stops.

Airports: The Federal Aviation Administration and the DOT have earmarked more than \$3 bil-

lion for 3,075 airports nationwide to upgrade technology and \$1 billion to 85 airports to modernize terminals.

Among beneficiaries is John F. Kennedy International Airport in the Queens borough of New York, which will tap into the IIJA to accelerate its \$4.2 billion Terminal 6 project, set to start its first phase in early 2023.

Ports and Waterways: The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has approved \$3.9 billion in IIJA allocations to 16 harbor and waterway construction projects across 10 states and Puerto Rico.

The federal Maritime Administration and the DOT have issued \$700 million in IIJA federal matches to help fund 41 port projects in 22 states and one territory to improve port infrastructure.

Land Ports of Entry: The U.S. General Services Administration reported that it has awarded \$3.4 billion in IIJA funding to build and modernize 26 land ports of entry nationwide.

Among the projects that will benefit from IIJA funding in this category and, perhaps, several others is the \$4.4 billion Gordie Howe International Bridge linking Detroit and Windsor, Ontario, Canada.

The six-lane span will be the longest cable-stayed bridge in North America when finished, increasing the Detroit River bridge's capacity from 18,500 cars per day to 26,500 by 2025.

The project also includes the construction of new entry points in the United States and Canada. It will be the largest Canadian port of entry on the border, while the 167-acre border entry on the U.S. side "will be one of the largest border facilities in North America."

Electric Vehicle (EV) Infrastructure: All 50 states have submitted Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Deployment Plans that have been approved by the Biden administration with \$1.5 billion allocated to help build EV chargers covering approximately 75,000 miles of highway nationwide.

Water Infrastructure: The IIJA earmarks \$55 billion designated to improve water infrastructure. The Environmental Protection Agency reported allocating more than \$9 billion to improve and repair water systems through the agencies' State Revolving Fund programs.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers also distributed \$200 million for water infrastructure projects to 26 states and three tribes to install backup generators, upgrade aging water and wastewater infrastructure, and construct stormwater improvement projects. ■

FACT:

A billboard message urges Congress to protect abortion rights and increase child care, comprehensive sex ed, and caregiver funding, in the Brooklyn borough of New York on July 21, 2022.

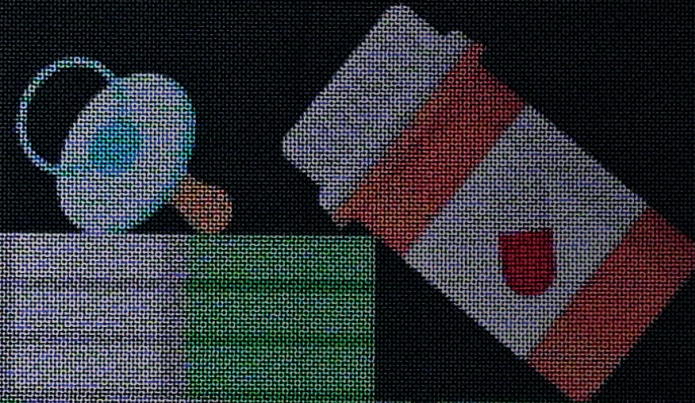
PHOTO BY BRYAN BEDDER/GETTY IMAGES FOR ULTRAVIOLET

STATE LEGISLATURES WILL DEBATE
A LANDSLIDE OF ABORTION BILLS
IN 2023

Most families are one health emergency away from bankruptcy.

Congress must invest in affordable childcare, protect sexual and reproductive health care, and support women and caregivers NOW.

#WeDem



LEGISLATION

STATES LOOK TO
**POST-ROE
ABORTION
BILLS**

BY JOHN HAUGHEY

STATE DEL. MARIE MARCH, a Republican, enters her second session in Virginia's General Assembly with lessons learned during her freshman year about the futility of half-measures on her mind.

That's why she'll carry a "personhood" bill when, on Jan. 11, the 100-member Virginia House of Delegates convenes in Richmond—one of 45 state legislatures that will kick off 2023 legislative sessions in January.

"Last session, I considered carrying a heartbeat bill, but that's six, seven weeks [during which abortion is allowed]," March told *The Epoch Times*. "I never carried it. I didn't think it went far enough. That's why I submitted this bill this year."

Pre-filed House Bill 1395 states that "life begins at conception and each person is accorded the same rights and protections guaranteed to all persons" and repeals all state law provisions "allowing for the performance of abortions."

HB 1395 has little chance to be adopted as drafted, she acknowledges, with a Democratic state Senate majority and Gov. Glenn Youngkin, a Republican, expressing support for restricting access to abortion—now legal for up to 24 weeks in Virginia—to no later than 15 weeks but not endorsing attempts to outlaw it altogether.

"It will be interesting to see how it all plays out," March said.

While the commonwealth "goes back-and-forth between Democrats and Republicans, they refer to it as being a purple state," she said her constituency in southwest Virginia's Floyd County is bright red and that HB 1395 reflects what her voters demand.

"We almost feel like NoVa [Northern Virginia] is a different country," March said. "We don't hardly have a voice. So that was my promise to my voters," to carry the conservative bills,

The trend among pre-filed bills confirms a sharp partisan divide, with blue states poised to get bluer, or more expansive, and red states set to get redder, or more restrictive.



including an abortion ban, to be heard in Richmond.

March is among the nation's 7,386 state lawmakers who will wade through a complex and massive matrix of abortion-related legislation and litigation in every state with new regulatory authority in 2023.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, since the U.S. Supreme Court's 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling made access to abortion a federally protected right, states have enacted more than 1,000 abortion-related laws—nearly half since 2010—that probed the

peripheries of the issue with limited, often court-defined restrictions or enhancements.

This already robust realm of abortion legislation is set to get even more expansive following the Supreme Court's *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* ruling in June, which shifted abortion regulation exclusively back to the states.

BRAVE NEW ABORTION REGULATORY WORLD

Since only 10 state legislatures were in session when that decision was handed down in June, upcoming 2023 sessions—45 legislatures convene in January, including 35 that convened during the week of Jan. 1—will mark the first time the vast majority of state lawmakers deliberate on abortion with unfettered post-*Roe* regulatory authority.

State lawmakers in 2023 will see

a landslide of abortion-related bills across an evolving tableau of legislation extending beyond gestational limits and total bans, spanning such issues as "chemical or medication abortion," family/maternity leave laws, insurance regulations, and maternal health initiatives. These bills are being pre-filed along with proposed protections for abortion providers/patients from "out-of-state harm" and counter-proposals to impose "out-of-state harm"—including criminal culpability—on those who cross state lines to circumvent abortion restrictions.

Pointing to the 2022 midterms' mixed results, abortion rights advocates and opponents say they have momentum entering 2023 legislative sessions.

Proponents such as the Guttmacher Institute and National Institute for Reproductive Health maintain the *Dobbs* ruling galvanized a constituency that



(Left) A pro-life demonstrator stands in front of the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington, on May 5, 2022. (Above) Pro-choice activists rally after the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, outside the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington on June 30, 2022.

engaged forcefully during 2022's midterm elections, sending a message that total bans aren't popular in many states, even among some conservative voters.

That reaction blunted Republicans' "red wave" midterm ambitions, most notably in battleground states such as Michigan and Pennsylvania, while prompting voters in six states—including conservative Kansas and Kentucky—to uphold abortion access as a right, they say.

Conversely, groups such as National Right to Life and Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America (SBA) say millions of voters embraced pro-life candidates up and down ballots in November, elevating or returning to office thousands of state lawmakers who campaigned on platforms that called for abortion restrictions, including many who advocate for total bans under "personhood" bills.

Republicans increased their numbers by nearly 2 percentage points during the 2022 midterms to collectively occupy 55.5 percent of state legislative seats and Republican supermajorities in several states were elected with an explicit mandate to ban abortion in 2023, pro-life groups say in dismissing Democrats' claims that the midterms were a referendum rejecting abortion bans.

"They were all rewarded by voters for their pro-life stances," SBA State Poli-

cy Director Katie Glenn said. "Pro-life governors went 12-0 [in the November elections]."

On the other hand, Glenn told *The Epoch Times*, "in some states, abortion was 'the' progressive issue" of the midterms, with candidates who campaigned on protecting access in those states also being "rewarded" by voters at the polls.

That sets the stage for polar divergencies in how state lawmakers approach abortion regulation in 2023. The trend among pre-filed bills confirms a sharp partisan divide, with blue states poised to get bluer, or more expansive, and red states set to get redder, or more restrictive.

The difference is that Democrat-majority legislatures are expected to uniformly enshrine abortion access while there's discord within many Republican-controlled chambers between conservatives demanding Republican caucus support for no-compromise total bans, such as March's "personhood" HB 1395 in Virginia, and moderates who argue that there isn't enough appetite among voters across the country to ban abortion, but ample opportunity across a swath of states to adopt an array of restrictions and regulations in 2023.

"To some degree, that is true," Glenn said. "But following the elections in November, we're optimistic. We see ☛

FROM L. JIM WATSON/AFIP VIA GETTY IMAGES; NICHOLAS KIM/AFIP VIA GETTY IMAGES

real opportunities to enact stronger gestational protections earlier (in pregnancies) in a couple of states” while defending and strengthening “trigger” bans across 21 states and supporting “personhood” total bans where politically feasible.

‘TRIGGER’ LAWS AND GESTATIONAL RESTRICTIONS

When the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe, returning abortion regulation to the states, laws across at least 23 states that prohibited abortion were on the books.

There were 13 states with “trigger” bans that were automatically activated when abortion regulation returned to the states: Arkansas, Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, and Wyoming,

Arizona, Indiana, and West Virginia adopted bans post-Dobbs, while Republican-majority legislatures in Wisconsin implemented an 1849 abortion ban law and in Michigan, a 1931 abortion ban. Heartbeat laws were set to be implemented in Georgia, South Carolina, and Ohio, technically banning abortion across 23 states.

As of Dec. 18, court rulings have stymied the implementation of 11 of 18 state abortion bans. Georgia’s is the only one of three heartbeat laws that remain in effect while its merits are set to be deliberated before the state’s Supreme Court.

Glenn said abortion opponents are hopeful that Georgia’s heartbeat law, adopted in 2019 as The LIFE Act, will be upheld by the state’s Supreme Court, especially after justices in early December ruled it could remain in effect while the case is pending.

Further abortion restrictions being adopted by Georgia lawmakers are “something we could see” in 2023, she said.

“We’d like to see the ‘chemical abortion’ bill come back in play,” Glenn said. “Last year, Georgia got close to enacting safeguards around that issue.

“The states likeliest to have serious proposals to move gestational restrictions earlier are Virginia, North Carolina, Nebraska, and Florida because those are states where they already have good laws, GOP majorities, and fewer court challenges—with an asterisk for Florida.”



(Left) Children sit in front of signs encouraging voters to vote yes on Amendment 2, which would add a permanent abortion ban to the Kentucky Constitution, during a rally on the steps of the Kentucky state Capitol in Frankfort, Ky., on Oct. 1, 2022. (Above) Signs in favor of and against the Kansas Constitutional Amendment on Abortion are placed along the Kansas 10 Highway in Lenexa, Kan., on Aug. 1, 2022.

7,386
STATE LAWMAKERS

WILL WADE THROUGH A COMPLEX and massive matrix of abortion-related legislation and litigation in every state with new regulatory authority in 2023.

1,000
LAWS

SINCE THE U.S. SUPREME COURT'S 1973 Roe v. Wade ruling, states have enacted more than 1,000 abortion-related laws that probed the peripheries of the issue with limited, often court-defined, restrictions or enhancements.

PROSPECTIVE 2023 STATE ACTIONS

— **FLORIDA:** In their 2022 session, Florida lawmakers banned abortion after the 15th week of pregnancy with no exceptions for rape and incest. Two lawsuits have prevented the law from being implemented, but with Republican lawmakers owning supermajorities in both chambers, they appear poised to introduce bills seeking further restrictions— at least down to 12 weeks—if not total bans.

Gov. Ron DeSantis has called the 15-week prohibition “very reasonable” but has shied away from endorsing further restrictions or a proposed 2020 heartbeat bill that died in committee. On Dec. 15, however, he told reporters that he was ready to “sign great life legislation” in 2023.

As of Dec. 18, only 59 bills had been filed for Florida’s 2023 legislative session, which begins on March 7. None are related to abortion.

— **NORTH CAROLINA:** Glenn said a total abortion ban in Virginia—such as March’s “personhood” bill—is unlikely to pass, but restrictions are “in play” in North Carolina, where Republicans gained a supermajority in the Senate in November and came within one vote of a supermajority in the House.

“The margins are tight, but it’s a state with pro-life Democrats,” she said.

Proponents could “form a coalition around the heartbeat law” but would “need to hold tight ... to override [Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper’s] veto.”

North Carolina Republican leaders appear to favor restricting abortion to 12–13 weeks, down from the 20 weeks that it’s now legally accessible in the state.

— **NEBRASKA:** State lawmakers in the unicameral Nebraska Legislature failed to adopt a measure restricting abortion to 12 weeks, down from 20

weeks, last summer. But conservatives say that after November’s elections, they have the votes to do that and maybe go further.

State Sen. David Murman, a Republican in all but official designation in the nonpartisan chamber, told The Epoch Times, “We will have some kind of pro-life bill in the Nebraska legislature this session. My suspicion is it will be something like a heartbeat bill.”

Murman, who represents six counties across southcentral Nebraska, said lawmakers can’t pre-file bills, so he’s uncertain what type of abortion legislation will emerge until the session convenes in Lincoln on Jan. 4.

“I don’t know exactly what the bill will say at this time,” he said. “My hope is we can get something restrictive passed—the more restrictive, the better in my view. I follow the science. I know that life begins at conception, at fertilization.”

When voters in November overwhelmingly installed pro-life lawmakers in the Senate, it was a not-so-subtle nudge to state lawmakers to impose more restrictions on abortion in 2023, according to Murman.

“Right now in the United States,

[abortion] laws are comparable to China and North Korea, so we need to get stronger pro-life laws on the books,” he said.

— **SOUTH CAROLINA:** State lawmakers adopted a heartbeat law in 2021 that was blocked and unblocked in court rulings until the South Carolina Supreme Court suspended enforcement while it ponders the law’s merits.

In a summer special session, dominant Republicans couldn’t agree on how extensive restrictions should be, whether to impose a total ban, or if it should include an exception for rape victims.

“South Carolina didn’t get it done in a special session” and its heartbeat law is “still facing arguments in their Supreme Court,” Glenn said, but there’s “opportunity for legislation post-Dobbs” in South Carolina in 2023.

Indeed there is, maintains state Rep. John McCravy, a Republican, noting that while it may not have manifested as expected across much of the country, there was a “red tidal wave” in South Carolina, where Republicans gained eight seats in the state House, making passage of a “personhood” bill totaling banning abortion likely in 2023. ♦

FROM L: STEFAN RENOLD/ASA/PA/AGETTY IMAGES; KYLER VAS/GETTY IMAGES



Pro-life protesters hold up signs inside of the Indiana Capitol building in Indianapolis, Ind., on July 25, 2022.

State lawmakers in 2023 will see a landslide of abortion-related bills spanning such issues as ‘chemical or medication abortion,’ family/maternity leave laws, insurance regulations, and maternal health initiatives.

McCravy previously told The Epoch Times that he planned to pre-file a “personhood” bill banning abortion “to the point of conception” for the 2023 session by Dec. 15, 2022.

He said that “it will be the same bill as last year with a few tweaks from the battles during the debates” that rocked last summer’s special session.

“We should have strong support for it,” McCravy said, which he described as “building up” among Republican lawmakers in the House since the Dobbs decision, but not so much in the Senate, where his 2022 “personhood” bill was heavily amended before it died.

“I feel like it will pass. The question is, are we going to let the Senate try first?” McCravy noted that it’s critical to get such a bill while a “pro-life governor”—Republican Henry McMaster—is in office.

“We never give up. This is an issue I will be on as long as I’m an elected official,” he said. “My view on it is the legislature makes the laws. I don’t think we should pay attention to justices who take it upon themselves to make laws.”

— **MISSOURI:** One of the states in which a trigger ban outlawing abortion—except in medical emergencies and when necessary to save the life of the mother—is in effect, state Rep. Brian Seitz, a Republican, will nevertheless reintroduce his 2022 “personhood” bill in 2023.

Seitz told The Epoch Times that his proposed HB 167 would ensure that “any unborn child conceived in the state of Missouri would have all the rights and liberties of any other Missouri citizen—and that includes the right to life.”

He said his 2022 “personhood” bill made it through the committee amendment process, “all the way through the Fiscal Review Committee,” but stalled in the Senate. “After midterms, we now have a more favorable Senate,” he said.

Missouri already has “some of most pro-life legislation in the United States,” Seitz said, but adopting a “personhood” bill “will make that pro-life stance even stronger” and frustrate efforts by abortion advocates to get a

ballot measure enshrining abortion access as a right before voters.

“With the initiative petition process, a ‘personhood’ bill would head that off at the pass, if that individual in the womb is declared a human person with the right to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness,” he said.

Seitz has also pre-filed HB 163, which would make it a felony to “knowingly import, export, distribute, deliver, manufacture, produce, prescribe, administer, or dispense ... any medicine, drug, or other means or substance to be used to induce an abortion on another person.”

— **WYOMING:** State lawmakers adopted HB 92, essentially a heartbeat bill, in February 2022 with Gov. Mark Gordon, a Republican, signing it into law in March 2022. The law went into effect five days after the Dobbs ruling but was stayed by a state district judge and remains suspended pending a hearing before the state’s Supreme Court.

State Rep. Rachel Rodriguez-Williams, a Republican, who sponsored the 2022 bill, said she’s confident that the law will be upheld and regardless of the ruling, expects to see “more legislation this session” related to abortion that “supports women and protects children.”

“The overturning of Roe leaves no doubt that states have a compelling interest in protecting the unborn in every stage of development,” she told The Epoch Times. “I believe that Wyoming is a very pro-life state. Overturning Roe gives Wyoming a chance to affirm that life is a human right.”

Glenn said Iowa, Montana, New Hampshire, and Texas are among the other states expecting to see significant slates of restrictive abortion legislation in 2023, noting that there’s “a lot of energy in Iowa, a very pro-life state,” where Republicans have secured supermajorities in both chambers and that instead waiting for a court ruling on their 2019 heartbeat bill, may simply readopt it or pass a “personhood” measure totally banning abortion. ■



Technicians use a service system lift to access the target chamber interior for inspection and maintenance at the National Ignition Facility at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in Livermore, Calif., in this file photo.

PHOTO BY PHILIP SALTONSTALL/LAWRENCE LIVERMORE NATIONAL LABORATORY/HANDOUT VIA REUTERS



FUSION'S ENEMIES

The fusion breakthrough means no apocalypse for our grandchildren. **50**



1-2 MILLION COVID DEATHS LIKELY IN CHINA

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Thomas McArdle



Fusion's Enemies

The fusion breakthrough means no apocalypse for our grandchildren

ON DEC. 5, SCIENTISTS at the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory's National Ignition Facility in California aimed 192 laser beams at a pinhead-sized target containing deuterium and tritium, and a fusion reaction succeeded in releasing more energy than the amount delivered by the lasers. But this achievement of inertial confinement fusion is not only the first time in history that nuclear fusion has worked under controlled conditions (in contrast to a thermonuclear bomb); those lasers also disintegrated the green energy fanatics' arguments in favor of dismantling the world's more than 90 percent fossil fuel-based \$85 trillion economy.

Nuclear fusion is the means of energy generation conducted within the sun, and for mankind's needs, it's a source of energy that's, for all practical purposes, infinite. Unlike the nuclear fission utilized in today's nuclear power plants, fusion wouldn't generate unstable nuclei that remain radioactive for millions of years and must thus be transported for permanent disposal to nuclear waste sites. Nor would fusion entail the risk of accidents releasing fatal amounts of radioactivity to populated areas (the danger of which the nuclear power industry has minimized in recent decades); nor could a fusion apparatus be used to construct nuclear weapons.

Now that we know inertial confinement fusion works in a controlled laboratory setting, the challenges in bringing about its widespread industrial use, which pertain to energy delivery to the target, the availability of tritium or the development of the use of an alternative such as boron or helium-3, symmetry control, heating and density of the fuel, hydrodynamic stability, and shockwave conver-

gence, can all be expected to be solved within the next 40 years.

But if you think the left, both here and around the world, is going to stand for their mission to cripple capitalism being derailed by a scientific breakthrough, you don't know them. Fusion opens the floodgates of energy; radical environmentalists, on the other hand, want energy to trickle down and be rationed in accordance with government edicts.

If we want nuclear fusion to come on line cheaply as soon as possible, we will let private industry be in charge, instead of dreaming up a plethora of new, excessive regulations.

Instead of a world of limitless possibility in which even those who are now poor can live out their dreams, the left's dream is a world of severe restrictions on economic prosperity and individualism; a global economy in which solar panels, windmills, and mass transit are forced on the public as a duty; and a society in which the freedom of driving your own family car is replaced by the mobility limits, enforced conformity, and artificial community—not to mention discomforts, lack of privacy, and crime—of the bus and train for all (except possibly the likes of Biden climate envoy John Kerry and other climate policemen among our governmental betters, who are wedded to private luxury travel).

In the years to come, we can expect them to insist on unreasonably heavy regulatory hurdles imposed by the government when fusion becomes industrially feasible. In other

words, artificial impediments to the realization of fusion's benefits for mankind.

However, there can be no forgetting that the environmentalist left is driven by the irrationality of pure fanaticism and that their objective is to revolutionize society into complete unrecognizability. Just in September, Jane Fonda was asked how her new climate-focused political action committee "will be able to deliver on a fully de-carbonized America."

Instead of presenting any science, Fonda replied: "There would be no climate crisis if there was no racism. There would be no climate crisis if there was no misogyny," saying that "we need to take a good look at" America's free market economic system. "All of the experts, and I'm not one, say this will force us and this will be an opportunity to restructure the way humanity lives on the planet. ... Between now and 2030, we could cut fossil fuels in half, but then we have to do a whole lot of other things."

If we want nuclear fusion to come online cheaply as soon as possible and produce the definitive solution to a hotter earth, we'll let private industry be in charge, largely unfettered, instead of dreaming up a plethora of new, excessive regulations.

And in the meantime, with total global oil shale resources 1,000 times greater than the more than 1.6 trillion barrels of crude oil reserves in the world that by themselves will last us another half century, as well as 100 years of clean natural gas that's now reachable within the United States alone thanks to fracking, the fusion breakthrough means no apocalypse for our grandchildren to suffer after all.

So in the near term, keep solar panels and windmills secondary, and drill, baby, drill.

Anders Corr



1-2 Million COVID Deaths Likely in China

Beijing's lack of preparation is at fault for the COVID wave

CHINA'S DAM AGAINST COVID-19 has broken. Beijing canceled lockdowns precipitously, and the resulting tidal wave of infections is inundating the country.

Hundreds of millions of Chinese are now estimated to have COVID-19. China's biggest cities, including Beijing, are the hardest hit. Half of Shanghai could already be infected. Modeling predicts as many as 1 million to 2 million deaths in China will result from the current wave.

The Omicron coronavirus variant has been less deadly elsewhere due to mature vaccination campaigns, exposure to prior variants, better medical technologies, and developed hospital infrastructure, including the multiplication of fully equipped intensive care units.

The regime in Beijing, however, prioritized lockdowns and neglected the rest. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rejected the best medicines from the West, including mRNA vaccines produced by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna. The CCP also neglected monoclonal antibody medicines, such as Paxlovid and Evusheld, to prevent COVID-19 and treat mild and moderate cases.

Only in February 2022 did Beijing approve Paxlovid for emergency use. But except for Party elites and their friends, supply lags demand. Local companies that produce competing products are the intended beneficiaries.

The CCP is so unprepared for the current wave of infections in China that many of the country's elderly, who are most at risk from COVID-19, are unvaccinated or unboosted using even the locally developed and relatively ineffective Sinovac and Sino-pharm vaccines.

Rather than prioritize the most elderly populations for vaccination, as in the West, the regime focused on working-age populations, apparently

as a triage measure. Until March 2021, those aged older than 60 in China were banned from receiving vaccines. That ban should be considered criminal.

Pharmacies in cities across the mainland report shortages of antigen tests, off-the-shelf fever medicines, and ibuprofen, leading concerned family members in Singapore and Hong Kong to send basic cold medicines by post. They can take a week to arrive.

The CCP is desperately trying to hide its latest COVID wave while simultaneously directing blame to November's anti-lockdown protesters.

Emergency rooms in China are low on oxygen and staff. Retired medical personnel are recalled and required to work, even if they're sick from COVID-19 themselves.

The CCP has refused offers by the United States to supply medication on an emergency basis. The regime's hyper-nationalism likewise led to the refusal of the West's mRNA vaccines. Beijing is apparently too proud to accept any assistance from the West, even in life-or-death situations, to avoid demonstrating to regular Chinese citizens that the CCP isn't, in fact, at the cutting edge of biotechnology.

The cover-up of overflowing hospitals and morgues is a stunning failure by the CCP, whose cover-ups caused the global pandemic in the first place. Had the regime followed protocols developed after the SARS epidemic in the early 2000s, COVID-19 might have been nipped in the bud, and almost 7 million global deaths, so far, might have been avoided.

Now the world, including Chinese citizens, trusts the regime less than

ever. Due to the current wave of infections and the CCP's upcoming opening of the country's borders for mainland travelers after Jan. 8, the world is increasing protective measures while Beijing downgrades its own. The result is convergence.

After Jan. 8, China will shift from eight days of quarantine for incoming travelers to just a negative test within 48 hours of travel. Several countries are doing the same to China. The United States, Japan, Taiwan, Malaysia, Italy, and India have all increased rules for travelers from the country.

The strategy seeks to stop new post-Omicron variants from spreading beyond China. But the measures will have little effect, as such variants can develop anywhere, and travelers from China are, in any case, fanning out to third countries that have no such restrictions.

The new measures against Chinese travelers, including by the Biden administration, are better understood as "political inoculation," according to The Wall Street Journal. They allow politicians to claim that they did something about China's current COVID-19 wave and avoid obvious cases on planes. But they do little else.

The CCP is desperately trying to hide its latest COVID-19 wave while simultaneously directing blame to November's anti-lockdown protesters. But the fault is with the CCP alone. Its lack of transparency and planning failures directly result from its authoritarian medical and economic policies. It trumpeted its authoritarianism over the past three years, but in the final analysis, CCP leader Xi Jinping is again demonstrating that communism fails disastrously.

The 1.4 billion Chinese people are the victims. Transparency, democracy, and the market economy, including pharmaceutical development, again prove their life-saving superiority.



Progress Against Inflation?

The Fed has done well so far, but the job is not yet done

THE FEDERAL RESERVE has made remarkable progress in its counter-inflation efforts. Flows of new money into the economy—the ultimate inflationary fuel—have slowed and, by some measures, reversed. Meanwhile, consumer price pressures seem to have moderated. Signs are indeed encouraging.

It would, however, be a mistake to look for a quick end to inflationary concerns. Inflation such as what this country has suffered neither lifts quickly nor easily. It will take time, and the Fed will have to continue its counter-inflation efforts for a while longer before the country can declare itself inflation free.

The news on money flows is especially noteworthy. The Fed began its counter-inflation policies only in March 2021. It nudged up interest rates and began to unwind its “quantitative easing” program, through which it used outright bond purchases to inject liquidity directly into financial markets. Subsequently, Fed policymakers stepped up their game, raising interest rates more aggressively and reversing the “quantitative easing” program so that policy has withdrawn liquidity from financial markets.

In response, the so-called monetary base—mostly Fed-provided reserves at banks from which banks create circulating money—has reversed direction. After growing at an astronomical rate of 35 percent per year between 2020 and 2022—surely a major cause of the inflation—this base declined by almost 13 percent in just the seven months between March and October 2022, the most recent period for which data are available. The broad M2 measure of money in circulation also declined over this same time by almost 2.5 percent.

As these liquidity patterns have

begun to remove inflationary fuel from the economy, the latest inflation measures have also offered encouragement. The consumer price index (CPI) rose by only 0.1 percent in November. Measured over 12 months, the CPI still showed a disturbingly high rise of 7.1 percent, but it was nonetheless a considerable improvement over the frightening 9.1 percent 12-month rise reported in June.

The Fed will have to continue its counter-inflation efforts for a while longer before the country can declare itself inflation-free.

Price details, however, warn to not take these signs of relief too much to heart. Food prices, for example, rose at a 6.2 percent annual rate in November, and shelter rose at an almost 7.5 percent rate. Neither did prices in these two important parts of household budgets show any significant deceleration from earlier months. Indeed, except for fuel prices and the prices of used cars—both of which show less a fundamental moderation than an adjustment from an earlier, untenable spike—the rest of the CPI showed an uncomfortable inflationary momentum, if slightly slower than earlier in the year.

The history of inflation offers its own warning. Take the experience of the last great inflation during the 1970s and 1980s. After a 12 percent rate of CPI inflation in 1974, for example, the pace moderated to a relatively moderate 5 percent in 1976. Those who saw that as the end were shocked when 14 percent was recorded in 1979.

More recent figures tell a similar

story. Take 2003, for example, a year when the inflation average came in right on the Fed’s preferred 2 percent rate. The year began with a 0.5 percent CPI jump in January, a 6.1 percent annual rate of advance, enough to cause inflationary concerns. April and May, however, each saw CPI declines of 0.3 percent each, enough, if taken by themselves, to raise fears of outright deflation. But since the year came in right on target, either focus (and the attendant fears they brought) would have been dangerously misplaced.

Another lesson from the past emerges from wage patterns. Wages have been rising at historically rapid rates of just more than 5 percent per year. Earlier in the year, when inflation was running at its highest, these wage gains failed to keep up with the cost of living, but in recent months, wage gains have outstripped living cost increases. The problem is that worker productivity is on the decline. Output per hour fell at almost a 5 percent annual rate in 2022.

If companies continue to pay more in real wages than they see in worker productivity, the only protection for the bottom line is to raise prices, given these trends that seem likely in the coming months. During the last great inflation, this pattern—what economists refer to as the “wage-price spiral”—kept up a keen inflationary momentum even after the original cause of the inflation disappeared.

This potential for a wage-price spiral and these other cautionaries should send two essential messages to policymakers and the public. First, even though moderated, inflationary pressure remains. Second, it would, as a consequence, be a mistake for the Fed to abandon its counter-inflation policies any time soon—moderate them perhaps but a reversal risks future trouble.



The ‘Worst’ Spending Bill Ever

A huge funding measure isn’t in the public’s best interest, critics argue

IN YET ANOTHER LAST-minute attempt to avoid a government shutdown, both the Senate and the House approved a massive \$1.7 trillion spending bill, which has frustrated many, including commentators, policy experts, and the general public.

“This bill is further proof that Republicans and Democrats can come together to deliver for the American people,” President Joe Biden said in a statement on Dec. 23, 2022, before signing the bill into law.

However, some argue that the 4,155-page spending package might not be in the people’s best interest, especially when most of the legislators don’t know what they’re voting on.

One of the sharpest criticisms came from The Wall Street Journal editorial board, which wrote an op-ed, “The Ugliest Omnibus Bill Ever,” on Dec. 20, 2022, after congressional leaders unveiled the \$1.7 trillion spending package.

“This is no way to govern in a democracy, but here we are,” the editorial board wrote, calling the spending bill the “worst in history.”

Every year, lawmakers come under fire for using the omnibus to fund the entire government rather than passing regular spending bills on time. They’re also criticized for rushing through policy changes via omnibus, many of which require separate votes or couldn’t pass on their own.

Billionaire Elon Musk, who has recently spoken out on numerous political issues, also commented on the \$1.7 trillion omnibus package.

“Railroading through a giant spending bill that almost no one has read is unlikely to be in the best interests of the people,” Musk wrote on Twitter on Dec. 20, 2022.

Musk also created a Twitter poll asking people if the spending bill should be approved. More than 3.1 million Twitter users voted, with 71.2 percent voting



Among the projects criticized were \$3 million for The American LGBTQ+ Museum in New York City, \$3.6 million for a Michelle Obama Trail in Georgia, \$477,000 for the Equity Institute in Rhode Island, and \$1.2 million for LGBT pride centers.

“no” and 28.8 percent voting “yes.”

A bipartisan group began meeting behind closed doors weeks ago to draft the huge spending bill that ultimately surpassed last year’s omnibus package by 1,500 pages, totaling 4,155. However, that doesn’t include everything.

As Heritage Foundation policy expert David Ditch noted on Twitter, the legislative text is accompanied by an additional 2,670 pages of “explanatory documents,” which contain more than 3,200 earmarks, also known as pork projects.

Ditch cautioned that members were given only a few days to review the material, which is impossible to do, even with staff aid.

Romina Boccia, director of budget and entitlement policy at the Cato Institute, agreed, noting that even the

most diligent members of Congress and their staff wouldn’t be able to read through the large spending package.

“And that’s intentional,” she wrote in a blog. “The more time legislators would have to ponder the details of the bill, the more opposition to it would likely arise.”

Some examples of earmarks included \$1 million for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland, \$4 million for the Covina High School pool, and \$5 million for the Upper Columbia United Tribes Salmon Reintroduction Project.

Some Republicans and conservative media outlets have also voiced their disapproval of the spending package, claiming that the government is using tax dollars for “woke” initiatives.

Among the projects criticized were \$3 million for The American LGBTQ+ Museum in New York, \$3.6 million for a Michelle Obama Trail in Georgia, \$477,000 for the Equity Institute in Rhode Island, and \$1.2 million for LGBT pride centers.

The spending package also included \$47 billion in additional funding to Ukraine, which had broad bipartisan support. However, several House Republicans have criticized the aid, arguing that the funds would be better spent on domestic issues.

The word “Ukraine” appeared 96 times in the spending bill. Another popular word was “salmon,” which appeared 48 times in the bill. The spending package made available \$65 million “for necessary expenses associated with the restoration of Pacific salmon populations.”

The bill also included \$410 million for border security in Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia, and Oman, which has sparked criticism.

“What utter insanity that tens of billions are being spent for border security of other countries, but none for ours!!” Musk wrote on Twitter.

DANIEL LACALLE is chief economist at hedge fund Tressis and author of “Freedom or Equality,” “Escape from the Central Bank Trap,” and “Life in the Financial Markets.”

Daniel Lacalle

Interventionism Hurts Latin America

Why would ‘populist’ governments pursue policies that perpetuate poverty?



THE LATEST ESTIMATES from consensus for the main Latin American economies show a continent facing a lost decade. The region’s gross domestic product (GDP) growth has been downgraded yet again to a modest 1.1 percent for 2023, with rising inflation and weakening gross fixed investment. Considering that the region was already recovering at a slower pace than other emerging markets, the outlook is exceedingly worrying.

The poor growth and high inflation expectations are even worse when we consider that consensus estimates still consider a tailwind coming from rising commodity prices and more exports due to the China reopening.

How can a region with such high potential as Latin America be condemned to stagflation? The answer is simple. The rise of populist governments in Colombia, Chile, and Brazil has increased concerns about investor security, property rights, and monetary discipline.

Argentina is expected to post a modest 0.2 percent GDP growth in 2023 with 95 percent inflation and a debt-to-GDP ratio of 72 percent. Years of monetary and fiscal excesses have destroyed the purchasing power of the local currency and dilapidated the prospect of real growth. In Argentina, poverty has escalated to 36.5 percent of the population, and government policies are doubling down on interventionism, price controls, and higher taxes with the expected negative results.

Despite the tailwind of high demand for soya and cereals globally, Argentina is diving deeper into Venezuelan territory, where consensus expects another year of a weak 3 percent bounce after destroying 80 percent of the output in a decade, with enormous inflation of 132 percent.



Interventionism doesn’t aim to increase prosperity but to take full control of a nation.

The problem? The new governments in Chile and Colombia are announcing policies that resemble those of the “Peronist left” in Argentina, and the Alberto Fernández government in Argentina is looking more like Nicolás Maduro’s Venezuela each day.

Chile is expected to post no growth in 2023 despite an estimated higher copper price and 15 percent inflation. Colombia, which showed the strongest recovery from the COVID-19 crisis until 2022, in which consensus expects a 7 percent growth, is feared to stop in its tracks and deliver a poor 1.6 percent GDP growth with elevated inflation of close to 7 percent.

In Brazil, consensus expects a poor 0.9 percent growth with 5 percent inflation. It doesn’t look as bad as Argentina, but the first major announcement of newly elected President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has already triggered all alarm bells. Lula said he wanted to change the constitution to lift the spending limit and

increase government spending even more. The Brazilian currency and 10-year bond reacted aggressively to this risk, because everyone can remember that Lula’s “economic miracle” a decade ago came from massively high oil prices and, when the commodity bonanza ended, his successor Dilma Rousseff sent the country into a deep crisis in which spending soared and growth stagnated.

Global investors see the enormous potential of Latin America. However, when governments start to impose interventionist policies, put at risk property rights with expropriation threats, and, at the same time, massively increase monetary imbalances by printing currencies with no real global and diminishing local demand, the combination is destructive.

Why do citizens vote for politicians who implement confiscatory and extractive policies? In many economic debates in the Latin American media, one can hear the word “redistribution” repeated incessantly. Many believe that wealth is like a pie that can be cut and distributed at will but ignore that wealth is either created or destroyed; it doesn’t stay flat.

Monetary destruction is the easiest and most effective way of nationalizing an economy. Printing currency is a form of expropriation of wealth, as money creation is never neutral—it benefits the government and hurts real wages and savers.

Why would “populist” governments impose policies that perpetuate poverty and hurt the people? Interventionism doesn’t aim to increase prosperity but to take full control of a nation.

Extractive and confiscatory policies aren’t social measures, they’re profoundly anti-social. The worst thing is that once implemented, they become difficult to unwind. We should learn the lesson everywhere because it’s coming to your country soon.

TOMAS OUESTIA/AFPA VIA GETTY IMAGES

FAN YU is an expert in finance and economics and has contributed analyses on China’s economy since 2015.

Fan Yu

Is This the Last Crypto Winter?

The forces that drove crypto value lower in 2022 will likely persist

THE YEAR 2022 WAS THE worst period on record for cryptocurrencies.

The industry is on life-support. The crypto market has been rocked by scandals, mismanagement, bankruptcies, and potential fraud. Investor sentiment and trust are possibly at the lowest they’ve ever been, even after the Mt. Gox scandal in 2014, when the then-equivalent of \$460 million in Bitcoin was stolen by hackers.

This begs the question, will this be the last crypto winter—a prolonged bear market—ever?

Since the beginning of 2022, the total crypto market capitalization has fallen from \$2.2 trillion to \$850 billion. This represents potentially the biggest burst of a financial bubble ever within a year. In the same span, Bitcoin—the largest crypto asset—has fallen by roughly 65 percent.

The year 2022 witnessed the epic fall of FTX, a large international exchange, and the indictment of its founder and former CEO—and former crypto savant—Sam Bankman-Fried. Two leading crypto lenders, Celsius and BlockFi, have also declared bankruptcy. Last year’s third-biggest stablecoin, TerraUSD, lost all of its value. One of the biggest crypto hedge funds, Three Arrows Capital, also collapsed.

So what will the future hold?

Let’s begin by examining two external factors.

The first one is macro. The forces that have driven crypto value lower this year—aside from potential fraud such as FTX—will likely persist. Interest rates are likely to remain elevated regardless of inflation, putting pressure on all risk assets, including crypto. Money supply will remain tight around the world, reducing liquidity and allocations to speculative asset classes such as crypto. The crypto market’s famed accessibility and liquidity, such as its 24/7 trading,

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Many large crypto firms collapsed in 2022, and there’s almost zero contagion across traditional finance. That says something.

also makes it one of the easiest assets to sell if an investor needs to raise cash.

A second factor is the regulatory regime. Despite the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) announcing charges against Bankman-Fried, the allegations are fraud and misappropriation of client funds. But the SEC isn’t any closer to regulating the industry in substance. Fraud is bad. But such fraud can arise from any industry lacking any regulatory framework.

Will regulation finally come? Market watchers believe so, but it’s been too slow to develop, and the inherent nature of blockchain makes it difficult. However, it needs to start somewhere, potentially among stablecoins, which serve as the plumbing for much of the crypto trading market.

Part of FTX’s issue is its centralized nature. Investors and stakeholders were putting their trust in an institution. By its very definition,

a centralized institution could be sabotaged by bad actors. No matter how noble centralized institutions such as FTX, Binance, and Coinbase present themselves, there’s a lack of transparency and risk that their leadership could make a mistake or, worse, commit fraud.

Decentralized finance, decentralized autonomous organizations, and zero-knowledge ecosystems will be the future, claim some industry experts. These protocols run on the blockchain, with published policies and procedures determined by users, as opposed to central authorities, and full transparency. These types of organizations are what crypto was intended to facilitate, not entities such as FTX, which mimicked legacy banks and exchanges.

Many large crypto firms collapsed in 2022, and there’s almost zero contagion across traditional finance. That says something.

Critics believe that the crypto market is a closed loop of self-established investment and lending schemes that entirely drove its recent growth, buoyed by nothing more than hope and marketing. Indeed, Google searches for “Bitcoin” and “crypto” are at multimonth lows (and as an aside: The fact that a financial asset can be measured by Google search popularity is itself comical).

On Dec. 16, crypto-friendly accounting firm Mazars Group indicated that it would pause providing “proof of reserves” work for crypto clients such as Binance and Crypto.com. Armanino, another accounting firm that services crypto clients—and was the auditor for FTX.us—is ditching crypto firms altogether. One can debate the practical value of auditors, but they’re a foundation of any good financial market’s framework and contribute to investor trust.

For crypto, that trust may be depleted—and perhaps permanently.

THOUGHT LEADERS

‘There’s No Winner in America’s Oppression Olympics’

Vivek Ramaswamy explains how victimhood has upended America’s pursuit of excellence

“Affirmative action is the systemic racism that’s still here in America today,” Vivek Ramaswamy says. “And I’m sorry to say, it will then create the new kind of anti-black racism that we had spent so many decades moving on from.”

In this recent episode of “American Thought Leaders,” host Jan Jekielek sat down with entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy, author of the 2021 bestseller “Woke, Inc.: Inside Corporate America’s Social Justice Scam.” The two men also discussed Ramaswamy’s new book, “Nation of Victims,” which looks at America’s grievance culture—on both the left and the right—and how Americans have lost a sense of identity and purpose. This, Ramaswamy says, has paved the way for the politicization of business and the rise of “woke” capitalism.

JAN JEKIELEK: You argue in “Woke, Inc.” and in your second book as well, “Nation of Victims,” that people in the corporate world now focus on things that are very different than the creation of actual value.

VIVEK RAMASWAMY: That’s right. The case I made in “Woke, Inc.” was that the politicization of business is bad both for business and for our body politic. Most businesses have a worthy purpose when they serve their customers.

But when we impose these top-down political and social agendas on those businesses, they’re less good at making the widgets that people buy from them, which in turn creates less valuable businesses and a less prosperous society. This isn’t just a threat to capitalism, it’s also a threat to democracy.

In a democratic society, citizens are supposed to settle political differences through free speech and open debate, where everyone’s voice and vote count equally. When we delegate the authority to make those political decisions, whether and how to fight climate change or systemic racism, for example, what we’re really saying is that business elites in corporate boardrooms get to make those decisions, which sucks the air and the lifeblood out of a democracy.

In “Woke, Inc.,” I look at the merger between government and private

enterprise, doing together what neither could do on its own. I even trace the ways government is using private companies to do through the back door what government couldn’t do through the front door and the Constitution. At the same time, the question I ask in the second book is, “What is it about our culture and our national psyche that creates an entire generation that’s buying up this nonsense?”

MR. JEKIELEK: This is the case you make in “Nation of Victims”: that we’re in the midst of a national identity crisis, and it’s not just among the left.

MR. RAMASWAMY: Increasingly, most people younger than the age of 40 in the United States are demanding this virtue-signaling behavior and even encouraging it through their buying behaviors and their employment work patterns. It has less to do with corporate America and big government and more to do with our culture. My diagnosis at the end of “Woke, Inc.” and in “Nation of Victims” is that an entire generation is hungry for a cause, for purpose and meaning at this point in

our national history. The kinds of things that used to fulfill that purpose, such as patriotism, hard work, family, and faith, have slowly receded from modern life. That leaves a black hole of identity in its wake, which allows wokeism to find its home in the heart of the

PHOTO BY JACK WANG/ THE EPOCH TIMES



American soul.

We need to fill that identity vacuum with something based on the shared pursuit of excellence as part of what it means to be American. But the path getting from A to B is a complicated one, running through some uncomfortable terrain.

Not everyone is going to reach the finish line at the same time. Not everyone is even going to get to the same finish line, whether that’s on the basketball court, in the classroom, or in the system of free-market capitalism. We’re not going to have a system where everyone wins and

“Part of what it means to be American is to be able to pursue excellence unapologetically.”

loses equally if we have a true culture of excellence. They don’t go together.

MR. JEKIELEK: The Supreme Court is looking at affirmative action as we speak. What do you think should happen based on your thinking here?

MR. RAMASWAMY: The Supreme Court should strike down affirmative action. This was a mistake made decades ago. Let’s move on to a better way of rectifying alleged racial inequities in outcomes, which start at a very young age in the family and in broken public schools as early as kindergarten.

Go upstream and fix those problems instead of using this cosmetic band-aid on the back end of the process.

Because if affirmative action worked, then you wouldn’t have the same racial minority groups needing it to get into boarding school or college, the exact same racial minority groups that then need it to get into graduate school or the workforce.

I was at Harvard

for college. I was at Yale Law School. I saw it firsthand. The same groups require the same affirmative action programs every time, which is a good sign that it’s not working. It’s also a disservice to qualified members of those minority groups who get positions because of merit. They’re going to be judged in an unfair way by their non-favored peers.

It’s a form of anti-white and anti-Asian racism. One of the things that I talk about in “Nation of Victims” is the last rigorous study conducted on this. Thomas Espenshade found that when you looked at 10 elite colleges, there was a more than 400-point gap between SAT scores that an average Asian applicant would have to score versus the average black applicant.

Now, nobody talks about affirmative action for the NBA, but if you were to apply this, it would be the equivalent of asking someone who’s black to make a half-court shot, but someone who’s Asian gets a stair step right up to the hoop for a slam dunk.

We shouldn’t think it’s any different in science or engineering classrooms. It’s an assault on merit and excellence, and an assault on merit and excellence ♦♦

“This black victimhood epidemic is now creating an epidemic of white victimhood culture in our country.”

is an assault on the American soul. Part of what it means to be American is to be able to pursue excellence unapologetically.

Affirmative action, I can confidently say, is the single greatest form of institutionalized racism in the United States today. It's anti-white, anti-Asian racism, which then creates a backlash wave of new anti-black racism among the people who were penalized by it.

You get on an airplane, and you see a black pilot and you wonder if you're in the hands of a slightly less qualified pilot because an affirmative action mandate to achieve racial equality eliminated testing requirements. That's no one's fault other than the people who created the system that makes such inferences possible. That's what I call true systemic racism. Affirmative action is the systemic racism that's still here in America today. And I'm sorry to say that it will then create this new kind of anti-black racism that we had spent so many decades moving on from.

MR. JEKIELEK: In “Nation of Victims,” you make the argument that it's not just the left that thinks of themselves as victims. It's also conservatives.

MR. RAMASWAMY: One of my concerns is that this culture war ends with both sides infected by the same cancer, yet they continue to fight without realizing that they're actually members of the same victimhood tribe. One of the points I make is that there are legitimate reasons for conservative victimhood.

Think about student loan forgiveness as an example. That's recently in the news. Somebody who borrowed money to buy a truck and build a career as a trucker didn't get their loans forgiven for buying that truck,

even though somebody who went to Bryn Mawr College did for being a humanities major. People like the trucker are left holding the bag. Such justified reasons for victimhood and frustration resulted in the election of Trump in 2016.

Now go to the left-leaning version of this conversation. Take the war on drugs. Everyone has talked about this stuff ad nauseam, but there's a difference in arrest rates for crack cocaine versus non-crack cocaine. One is more disproportionate and prevalent in the black community. They'll say, “You blame us for having unstable family structures. Well, you're the guys who took the father figures and put them in jail.”

This black victimhood epidemic is now creating an epidemic of white victimhood culture in our

country. Second-generation Asian kids are trying to describe themselves as persons of color, inventing hardships for themselves that they didn't go through but that their parents or their grandparents had in coming to this country.

We have this victimhood metastasis where everyone wants to think of themselves as a victim. At some point, we must recognize that there's no winner in America's oppression Olympics. If there is a gold medalist, maybe it's China because of our assault on merit. It's America that loses in the end.

We have to get past this grievance tug of war to forget about victimhood and reclaim excellence. That's what we need to revive in our culture. ■

This interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.



Travelers in line to board a bus in front of a U.S. flag display in New York's Times Square on July 30, 2021.

ED JONES/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

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The Joy of Reading

Reading improves brain function while expanding our world

By Jeff Minick



SINCE WORLD WAR II, pollsters and the American people have categorized generations using slang terms and dates. The Silent Generation, baby boomers, Gen X, millennials, Gen Z, and now the latest addition, Generation Alpha, or Gen Alpha, are commonly used designations for those born within the same two decades or so.

In a related issue—we'll soon make the connection—many believe that books will eventually become obsolete, replaced by electronic devices. Numerous studies report reading itself is in decline, with many people preferring visual media to print.

Millennials—those born between 1981 and 1996—beg to disagree.

Surveys show that this generation, which is made up of men and women from their late 20s to their mid-40s, annually reads more books than any other group. In 2017, Forbes reported that “millennials read more than older generations do—and more than the last generation did at the same age.”

In a more recent online article, “The Surprising Reading Habits of Millennials,” Brendan Brown delves deeper into millennial reading habits. Not only do they read more books per year than other generations, but they also visit libraries more frequently and favor print books over digital reading. In contrast to other Americans, they prefer to read their

news rather than watch it. As Brown reported, they're incessant users of devices such as smartphones—94 percent own one—but they spend a good deal more time reading on those phones than watching videos.

Millennials are gaining the widely recognized benefits of reading books.

This is good news for our country and for the world. Here are just a few reasons why. First, millennials are gaining the widely recognized benefits of reading books, from building vocabulary to improved sleep to strengthening brain function. Another huge benefit is that readers beget readers. Moms and dads who pick up a book generally want their children to do the same, and kids enjoy copycatting their parents. Because these millennials will be the ones reading aloud to their young children and encouraging their teens to immerse themselves in stories, they'll be creating a new generation of book lovers.

Finally, many millennials read to improve their work and their personal lives. Most of the ones I know usually have a book going, and often they're reading not only for entertainment but as a form of continuing education. A home builder of my acquaintance subscribes to two print magazines on

that topic, a lawyer listens constantly to audiobooks or reads to stay sharp in his profession, and a homeschool mom is always looking for hints that will enhance the education of her children.

These folks who are reading to enhance their own situations may not realize it, but they're building a better society for the rest of us. The man who upgrades his construction skills because of some ideas he takes from a magazine article or the entrepreneur who expands her business and employs 14 people rather than two by reading “The E-Myth Revisited,” as was done by one young person I know, are truly nation-builders.

American author and reading advocate Jim Trelease nailed it when he wrote: “A nation that does not read much does not know much. And a nation that does not know much is more likely to make poor choices in the home, the marketplace, the jury box, and the voting booth. And those decisions ultimately affect the entire nation ... the literate and illiterate.”

Let's take a lesson from the millennials, pick up some books, and encourage others to do the same. It's one easy way we can keep our country alive and vibrant.

Jeff Minick lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. He is the author of two novels, “Amanda Bell” and “Dust on Their Wings,” and two works of nonfiction, “Learning as I Go” and “Movies Make the Man.”



Unwind



Those seeking an attainable adventure may want to consider stalking wildlife with a camera, under the guidance and protection of an experienced guide who allows “up-close” views.

PHOTO BY YEGOROV/SHUTTERSTOCK

Go Wild on a Photo Safari 68

WHEN STEVE MCQUEEN built his home, Malibu was a remote beach visited only by surfers. The beach is busy now, and his house is its crowning jewel. **62**

PROMPTED BY SEEING A PHOTO that made him look chubby, Kevin Curry decided to change his life for the better by combining exercise with smart eating habits. **67**

THIS COLLECTION OF four-door beauties has some surprises for those who think only stodgy grandparents drive sedans. **71**

Steve's Place

An unpretentious, yet eminently livable beach house

By Bill Lindsey



McQueen set the home high on a rocky bluff for privacy, with all three levels designed to provide unobstructed views of the beach and ocean.

WHEN STEVE MCQUEEN WAS THE King of Hollywood, he longed for a place where he could peacefully walk along the beach with his wife, Ali MacGraw. He found it in Malibu, California, long before it became overrun with celebrities and paparazzi. Built in the 1970s, his home still stands out from the crowd.

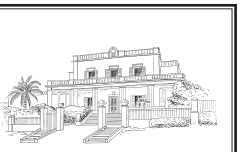
Set high on a rocky bluff in order to ensure privacy while providing an unobstructed view, the four-bedroom, five-bath residence—which was sold by McQueen's son Chad in 2020—has recently been extensively renovated, yet still exudes McQueen's sense of style. The crisp white exterior is all clean lines with jutting decks, expansive windows, and retracting glass walls. Located within the exclusive gated community of Victoria Point, the home's three levels afford unobstructed views of the Pacific Ocean. A private staircase allows easy access to the beach.

To bring the beach atmosphere inside in a much more extreme manner than usually available in a traditionally designed residence, all three levels of the home can be

opened in order to allow the ocean breeze in or closed to secure them from inclement weather, while also giving the residence its distinctive appearance.

Those in the top level's master suite enjoy the property's best vantage point of the surroundings, as well as an exterior staircase that bypasses the main entry for private access. The center level has a large, airy living room with a vaulted ceiling that's ideal for family gatherings or entertaining, equipped with a fireplace to chase away the chill of cool ocean nights. The well-equipped kitchen is set slightly higher above the living room, with ample granite counter food preparation areas and an adjacent dining area.

With the glass wall open, this room provides all the enjoyment of being on the beach, minus the sand. A wooden staircase framed by wood panels leads to the upper level. The lower level's den and bedrooms, with private bathroom facilities, are accented with wood plank flooring. McQueen was well-known for his love of cars and motorcycles, so it's only fitting that the home features a spacious three-car garage. ■



MCQUEEN BEACH HOUSE MALIBU, CALIFORNIA

\$16,995,000

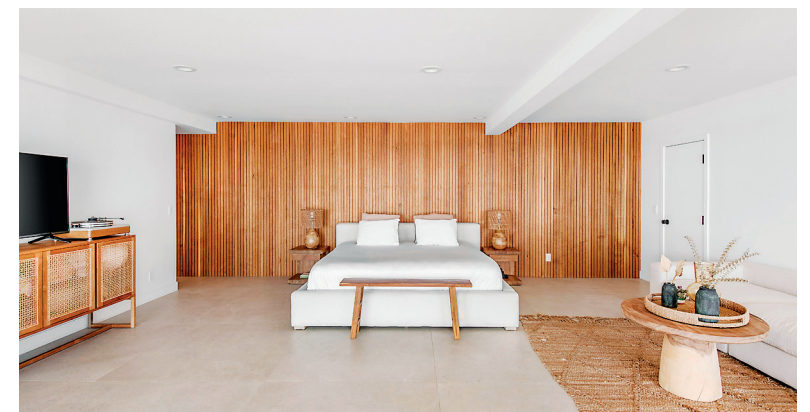
- 4,300 SQUARE FEET
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(Above) Due to its location right on the beach, the home features a three-car garage to protect vehicles from the salty environment. (Top Right) The glass wall can be fully retracted to bring the beach into the center level's living room, complete with a fireplace for chilly evenings. (Right) The very airy lower-level master suite features wood accents and a clean, uncluttered layout.



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Italy's Eateries

Take a rail trip through Emilia-Romagna and sample some of Italy's most iconic foods

By Kevin Revolinski



Babbio, a small ancient town in the province of Piacenza in Emilia-Romagna, Italy.

ITALY CONTAINS MORE PROTECTED food products than any other European Union nation, surpassing 300 and growing—and Emilia-Romagna has the largest share of any region with 47. Parma ham? Modena's balsamic vinegar? Bolognese sauce? We followed our stomachs and spent nearly two weeks riding the rails from city to city.

Parma

Our first stop was a three-night Airbnb rental a short walk from the train station at the edge of the historic center. Both the city and province are named Parma, known for Parma ham and Parmesan cheese. UNESCO lists it as a Creative City of Gastronomy.

But the center itself offers some glorious Romanesque buildings, including the fresco-filled 12th-century cathedral and the pink-marble baptistry. Attend a classical concert at the 19th-century opera house, Teatro Regio. Inside the redoubtable brick Palazzo della Pilotta is the impressive National Gallery and an archaeology museum.

What is there to eat? Try tortelli d'erbetta, pasta filled with herbs and ricotta, or cappelletti, little stuffed pasta hats in broth. For a snack or an in-room DIY charcuterie board, visit Salumeria Garibaldi to buy prosciutto di Parma and culatello di Zibello, an even rarer cured ham made only with the rear muscle of the haunch.

Modena

The home of the protected balsamic vinegar has a historic center with a UNESCO-honored 12th-century Romanesque cathedral and its 200-step bell tower. A block away, the early 20th-century Mercato Albinelli, a historic covered market, is a must-visit, not just to see the wide variety of fresh produce, cheeses, wines, and meats that the locals enjoy but also to get an easy lunch with several vendors serving fresh local dishes. Auto fans can't miss the Enzo Ferrari Museum, and opera fans will enjoy Luciano Pavarotti's Home Museum.

Hire a car or guide to drive to where the flatlands suddenly fold up into hills worthy of Tuscany, where the vineyards begin. The area is famous for bubbly Lambrusco. The estate winery, Opera O2, maintains a sleek modern boutique hotel and makes an excellent fancy lunch on its outdoor terrace overlooking wine country. It produces fine Lambrusco, as well as small-batch traditional balsamic vinegar.

A visit to Spilamberto's Traditional Balsamic Vinegar Museum, also a short drive outside Modena, is highly recommend- ❖

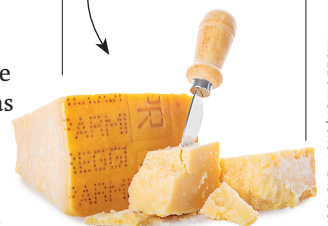
The University of Bologna is the **oldest university** in Europe.



Emilia-Romagna spans southeast of Milan to the Adriatic Sea.

Emilia-Romagna can be traveled via the Via Emilia, a roughly 2,200-year-old Roman road.

Parmigiano-Reggiano, dubbed the King of Cheeses.





Bologna, a rich destination for wanderers with its wealth of eateries, wine bars, historic churches, and museums.

ed. Many locals make it themselves according to tradition. And the museum sells the real deal—not the cheaper “condiment” style (blended with red wine vinegar) that most of us are used to in the United States.

Bologna

Home to the oldest university in Europe, Bologna is also the UNESCO-honored City of Porticoes. One can traverse most of the historic center sheltered from rain or sun on covered sidewalks, including the entire two-mile walk up to San Luca Basilica with its sweeping view of Bologna on one side and verdant hills on the other.

The largest city on this route, it’s a rich destination for wanderers with its wealth of eateries, wine bars, historic churches, and museums. Climb 498 steps to the top of the 319-foot Asinelli Tower, one of the city’s two leaning towers. The “Heaven and Hell” fresco alone makes a visit to the Basilica of San Petronio in Piazza Maggiore worth your while.

The eponymous foods? What we call bologna is mortadella, carved in plate-size, paper-thin slices at a deli and often containing pistachios. But tagliatelle alla Bolognese, the meat-based ragu, is the traditional meal. Learn how to make it yourself at Il Salotto di Penelope. Barbara and Pietro taught us how to make Bolognese and fresh pasta and to stuff cappelletti without any fancy machines or devices. At the end of class, you dine on

what you’ve created. Highly recommended!

Ravenna

We felt Ravenna was much more than a day trip. Eight separate sites are listed together for their impressively preserved colorful mosaics dating back to the fifth and sixth centuries. The tomb of poet Dante Alighieri stands there and witnesses a reading from The Divine Comedy each evening.

Consider booking a two-hour mosaic-making workshop at Barbara Liverani Studio. It isn’t just a creative learning experience, but also a load of fun and an opportunity to make your own souvenir.

Ferrara

Ferrara can also be a relaxed stay for a night or two. Tour it by bicycle—there are no hills, and no cars are allowed in the old city. Down an alley is the oldest wine bar in the world, Al Brindisi, where Polish astronomer Copernicus once roomed upstairs as a student.

Dine at Michelin-honored Trattoria da Noemi. The late Noemi opened a tavern there in 1958; today, her daughter runs a fantastic restaurant with her own two sons. Try the local specialty, salama da sugo, a sauce made with slow-cooked sausage served over potato puree or pasticcio di maccheroni, a baked pasta dish. ■

Kevin Revolinski is an avid traveler, craft beer enthusiast, and home-cooking fan.

If You Go

Fly: Unless you’re on a nonstop direct flight to Milan, you’re likely connecting in Europe. Choose Milan Linate Airport, less than 30 minutes by shuttle bus to Milan’s Central Station. Bologna also has a small international airport connected to the city by the Marconi Express monorail, a seven-minute ride.

Train: All central stations are within walking distance of each city’s historic center. We bought everything same-day from ticket vending machines at the station or Trenitalia online.

KEVIN CURRY IS INSPIRING OTHERS TO CHANGE THEIR LIVES FOR THE HEALTHIER, 1 STEP AT A TIME

For the founder of FitMenCook, it’s a journey that starts in the kitchen

By Deena C. Bouknight

A PHILADELPHIA NATIVE who now lives in Dallas, Kevin Curry grew up with good food. His mother enjoyed cooking comforting family recipes, and his childhood included plenty of soul food and Mexican cuisine.

But he struggled with extra pounds in high school and college—and was truly jolted one day when he saw a photograph of himself on social media. Looking for a solution, like so many others, he turned to the gym.

“I was wrong,” he later said. “There was not enough cardio or weights in the world that could get this fat off my back.”

Gradual education and trial and error eventually led him to the kitchen.

“I realized that if I was going to accomplish my fitness goals, it would have to be through a steady, healthy diet, complemented by hard work in the gym,” Curry said.

Realizing that many men had no idea how to maintain a healthy weight and lifestyle, Curry founded FitMenCook, an online community that inspires men—and women—to eat healthier and stay fit with food that he insists is “never boring.” Rather than completely cut out his favorite dishes, for example, he would “look at the ingredients and make swaps that were lower in calories and better for me nutritionally.”

Now, 10 years later, what began as a Tumblr blog has amassed a social media following of 2 million people globally on platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube and also has an app and a cookbook.

Curry has shared his own journey of fighting depression and unhealthy eating habits to help others.



For Curry, healthy food is far from bland or boring.



Curry’s philosophy is that a healthy body starts with diet—complemented by physical exercise.



Fitness influencer Kevin Curry, 41, started FitMenCook as a Tumblr blog in 2012.



CURRY’S TIPS FOR HEALTHY CHANGES

Pace Yourself: “Focus on one thing that could become a habit. Get excited about that. Then add something else.”

Keep Perspective: “Comparison robs us of the joy of progress. If you only look at the perfectly chiseled bodies, you look at yourself as less and get frustrated and impatient.”

Don’t Be Intimidated: “Just start cooking. Start with your favorite meal.”

Curry’s journey to healthier living wasn’t without its struggles. In the years before starting the blog, he helped care for his ill father, suffered a relationship heartache, failed to launch a career in his originally chosen field of communications management, and more. He battled depression and used unhealthy food habits as a coping mechanism. But he learned to turn food and cooking into a positive catalyst in his life.

“The focus on a healthier lifestyle gradually helped me dig out of depression,” Curry said. “The more that I cooked for myself and put my wellness first, the more I felt better—empowered, energized.

“It’s an ongoing journey, and people who struggle need to realize that. We all have different challenges happening in life.

Sometimes it might be harder to lose weight, or it might take too long and a person reverts back to old ways. We always have to consider age, circumstances, body type, and food access, and we need to give ourselves grace.”

Curry is encouraged by the stories of people he has helped. He recalled a mother who approached him at a book signing in Miami.

“She told me her daughter followed my site and she suffered from an eating disorder,” he said. “The mother couldn’t get her daughter to eat anything, but the daughter was inspired to begin preparing and eating the recipes I shared. She learned to see food in a healthful way. ... Those are the things that motivate me.” ■

Deena C. Bouknight, a 30-plus-year writer-journalist, works from her Western North Carolina mountain cottage.

Get Close to Nature

By Bill Lindsey

You don't have to go to Africa to experience the adventure of a photo safari



There are guided tours that let you see wildlife roaming free from a Jeep, a canoe, or your own car.

Africa is home to lions, but here in the United States, we have large native populations of bobcats.

THE TRADITIONAL IMAGE of a safari may find you searching for zebras and lions roaming the African veldt as you bounce along a rutted trail in a dusty Land Rover, but there are other closer-to-home, photos-only options to consider.

A photo safari is similar to a traditional hunting safari, with the distinct difference that in the former, you shoot with a camera. Otherwise, the experience can range from multi-day affairs far from civilization and staying in tents to day trips in comfortable, air-conditioned vehicles on well-tended paths. The idea of both is to provide the experience of seeing animals in their natural habitat—or a reasonable facsimile thereof—while you take photographs or observe them with binoculars.

Photo safaris can be found where the wildlife roams. While an African safari tops the list for the most authentic experience, it can also be the most expensive option, requiring a significant amount of time and effort on the participant's part. A quick internet search of "photo safaris United States" may yield results that are closer to home, are less expensive, and can be experienced in a few hours in a tour bus or from the comfort of your own vehicle—assuming you don't drive a

convertible, which would be less than optimum when driving near a pride of lions.

The Original Safari

Florida's Palm Beach County is home to Lion Country Safari, where lions, giraffes, rhinoceros, and a wide variety of other wildlife roam across 600 acres of land that closely resembles their native habitat. The park began operations in 1967 as the first cageless zoo in the United States. Visitors observe the animals in a near-natural environment from the comfort of their own vehicles, which was entirely unique at the time. The park is now home to animals from six continents, including ostrich, oryx, siamangs, chimpanzees, and the largest herd of zebras in North America. Functioning as a refuge for endangered species in addition to an entertainment venue, the park's veterinarian staff has a very successful breeding program.

Moose Sightings

Safaris aren't just for African creatures; Maine's Northeast Whitewater Lodge offers half-day photo safaris that allow guests to see moose in their native habitat. While Maine is well known for lobsters, it's also home to a large population of moose. Registered Maine guides shepherd



Yellowstone National Park is the only place in the United States where bison have lived since prehistoric times.

LEFT PAGE: PHOTO BY MARIKRAY/SHUTTERSTOCK; THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM L: SCOTT CANNING/SHUTTERSTOCK, TOMASHULIK ARTPOINT/SHUTTERSTOCK, JOHN MORRISON/GETTY IMAGES, BLVDONE/SHUTTERSTOCK

Large populations of bobcats and other wildlife roam our national parks, but unless visitors go with an experienced guide, few see them.



The Winter Wolves Safari in Yellowstone National Park is an ideal way to safely see these magnificent creatures in their everyday activities.



Established in 1872, the 3,472 square miles (2.2 million acres) of Yellowstone National Park provide a safe haven for a wide variety of wildlife





Tule Elk roam California's Point Reyes National Seashore, along with otters, badgers, elephant seals, whales, raptors, and other species.

guests on tours to observe these huge animals—when fully grown, they can weigh more than 1,000 pounds and be seven feet tall at their shoulders, with impressive antlers extending much further upward—by land in vans or by water in canoes. Private tours by land or water are also available for those who prefer to not travel in a crowd.

In addition to moose, guests are likely to see otters, bald eagles, loons, and other native wildlife. Photography is always encouraged from the van or canoe and sometimes on foot but only when the guide determines it safe to do so; these animals seem soft and friendly, but in reality, they can be dangerous if spooked or provoked, making guided safaris the best, safest way to see them.

Yellowstone Wildlife

Those seeking an immersive adventure may want to consider the Winter Wolves and Wildlife Safari in Yellowstone National Park. For three days, guides lead guests to Mammoth Hot Springs, Lamar Valley, and other remote areas of the park far from roads and crowds, where wolves are known to roam, along with ermine, otters, moose, bison, elk, bobcats, and cougars. Accommodations are arranged for the guests, either within the confines of the park or nearby, ensuring a warm meal and a comfortable place to sleep after a day spent exploring the park.

Binoculars and spotting scopes are provided to allow guests to watch the

wolves howl, hunt, play, and feed from a distance that ensures safety for both wolves and humans. Snowshoes are available to guests who seek a true winter wilderness experience, but they also have the option of remaining in the vehicles. In addition to seeing frozen waterfalls and thermal springs, guests will learn how to read animal tracks and how to behave in close proximity to wildlife.

A Packed Park

Africa is home to lions, but here in the United States, we have large native populations of bobcats. One of the best ways to see them running free is to take part in a photo safari at California's Point Reyes National Seashore. In addition to being the nation's top destination for bird watchers, with more than 50 percent of North American species present, this park is home to bobcats, tule elk, otters, gray foxes, coyotes, badgers, elephant seals, raptors, owls, and whales.

Guests are provided with binoculars and spotting scopes. Half-day safaris are five hours long, with the full-day safaris spanning 10 hours, from sunrise to sunset. For tours consisting of professional photographers, groups are limited to three guests, as more can be disruptive to wildlife; the guides will go out of their way to help guests find specific species.

At all of these parks, well-behaved children are always welcome, so take your family and go wild! ■

LIFESTYLE SAFARI ADVENTURE

The thrill of the hunt, in complete comfort



1

Do I Have to Go to Africa?

No. Photo safaris are available across the United States and Canada, as multiday or partial day outings. Use the internet to do a search by state or the wildlife you'd like to see.



2

What Should I Expect?

Your guide will take you to locations where wildlife is known to roam. Dress comfortably, use the restroom before you depart, and expect to be very quiet when near wildlife.



3

What Should I Bring?

Bring a camera and spare batteries for it. Also pack a small bag with water and snacks and any medication you may need.

Smart Cars

Coupes and convertibles might be sexier than four-door cars, but the ones in this collection have panache as well as practicality

By Bill Lindsey



Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

AUDI A4

\$40,300

Those who can't decide between rear-wheel or front-wheel drive will be entranced by the A4's Quattro all-wheel-drive system. It directs the exact amount of power from the turbocharged 2.0-liter, 201-horsepower engine to each wheel to ensure maximum grip. A 260-horsepower engine is available for those who want to go from zero to 60 in 5.2 seconds. The 12.3-inch display combines vehicle information and an array of entertainment options. An optional parking assist system provides steering guidance when maneuvering into tight spaces.



Baby Benz

MERCEDES A 220

\$33,950

Mercedes-Benz is known for making some of the world's best luxury vehicles, but not all of the firm's offerings are geared toward the rich and famous crowd. The nicely equipped A 220 base model price is comparable to the prices of the other sedans in this roundup when typical options are factored in. Powered by a 188-horsepower, 2.0-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine linked to a seven-speed dual-clutch automatic transmission, this front-wheel drive, upscale sedan is rated at 24 miles per gallon in city driving, thanks to the ECO start/stop function.



Big Car Style

HONDA ACCORD

\$26,520

Hondas have come a long way since the tiny N600 that resembled an oversized lunch box. Accords are now the industry standard for affordable, well-equipped sedans. The sleek exterior is accented by stylish aluminum wheels, while the cabin, with room for five in comfort, has features that are both practical and posh, such as the eight-inch touchscreen display and safety features that include an emergency braking system and adaptive cruise control. It's powered by a 2.0-liter VTEC engine delivering 252 horsepower and has 30 miles per gallon city fuel economy.



Bug Zapper

VW JETTA

\$20,655

While the iconic VW Bug could accommodate a driver and three passengers, the Jetta does it so much better. Beneath the attractive exterior lies a roomy cabin for up to four passengers and the driver, with impressive features such as the IQ safety system, which helps maintain a safe distance between vehicles ahead, while alerting the driver to objects in blind spots to the rear. Powered by a turbocharged, 158-horsepower engine, the Jetta can be ordered with a six-speed manual transmission or an eight-speed automatic.

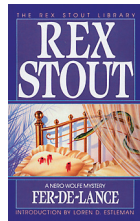
THIS PAGE FROM L. JULIE VADER/SHUTTERSTOCK; THE EPOCH TIMES

FROM TOP L: COURTESY OF AUDI, HONDA, TOYOTA, MERCEDES-BENZ, VOLKSWAGEN

RECOMMENDED READING

This week, we feature a close look at how species are named, a legendary fictional detective's first case, and the brilliant history of a World War II code

FICTION

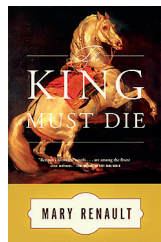


'FER-DE-LANCE'
By Rex Stout

Nero Wolfe Begins

There's so much pleasure that comes from experiencing a detective's first case. This is what you get with "Fer-de-Lance," a story involving a deadly snake—the first case in the successful Nero Wolfe series that set the standard for the famous armchair detective.

CRIMELINE, 1934, 304 PAGES



'THE KING MUST DIE'
By Mary Renault

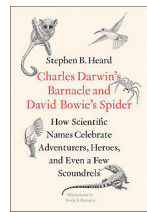
Myth, History, and Adventure

In this recreation of the Minoan Age and the tale of Theseus and the Minotaur, Renault excels, as she did in several of her historical fictions, in recreating the ancient Greek world. Here we follow Theseus as he grows to young manhood and into a hero who eventu-

ally confronts the Minotaur on Crete. Loyalty, betrayal, courage, the passions of life and love, and personal sacrifice mark Renault's superb recreation of this legend. The book ends with Theseus's safe return to Athens, having slain the beast.

VINTAGE BOOKS, 1988,
338 PAGES

SCIENCE



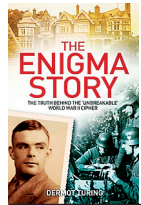
'CHARLES DARWIN'S BARNACLE AND DAVID BOWIE'S SPIDER'
By Stephen B. Heard

A Look at Naming Species

People like order, especially scientists. Even the naming of living things has become a science called taxonomy. This book takes an in-depth look at the naming of things, specifically the hows and whys in regard to naming living creatures. Stephen B. Heard describes how the process of nomenclature works. The rules lack the force of law but are followed regardless. He then plunges into the weird world of eponymous naming: naming things after individuals. It's a truly fascinating history.

YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS,
2020, 256 PAGES

HISTORY



'THE ENIGMA STORY'
By John Dermot Turing

'Enigma' Fully Revealed

Did codebreaking win World War II for the Allies? This book tackles that question. It provides a fresh look at the history of Enigma, a Nazi device to encode messages. Putting codebreaking in historical context, Turing attacks myths created by prior authors with incomplete knowledge. This may be the most complete examination of the history of Enigma to date. For those interested in World War II, this is a must-read history.

SIRIUS, 2022, 240 PAGES

SELF-REFLECTION



'GIFT FROM THE SEA'
By Anne Morrow Lindbergh

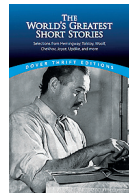
Shells, Solitude, and Serenity

It's the mid-1950s. Anne Morrow Lindbergh takes a break from her husband and five children to

spend a few weeks in solitude at the seashore. There, she reflects on the gifts of space, time, and being alone with her thoughts and aspirations. This beautifully written book offers great and simple wisdom for generations of readers.

PANTHEON-50TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION, 1991,
144 PAGES

CLASSICS



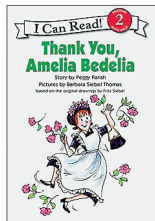
'THE WORLD'S GREATEST SHORT STORIES'
By George Long and Aubrey Stewart

Perfect Fireside Tales

This Dover Thrift Edition features 20 great stories from around the world. Herman Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener," Rudyard Kipling's "The Man Who Would Be King," Anton Chekov's "The Lady With the Toy Dog," John Updike's "A&P," and more bring you some of the best of this genre. A few of these tales, such as Yasunari Kawabata's "The Grasshopper and the Bell Cricket" or Jorge Luis Borges's "Borges and I" can be read in just a few minutes, while others, such as Leo Tolstoy's "The Death of Ivan Ilyich" push the limits of this form.

DOVER PUBLICATIONS, 2006,
256 PAGES

FOR KIDS

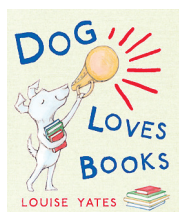


'THANK YOU, AMELIA BEDELIA'
By Peggy Parish

Childhood's Beloved Housekeeper

Great-Aunt Myra is coming for a visit, and the story's wordplay will bring laughter to the young, as the literal-minded Amelia makes her preparations, paring vegetables and stripping sheets. Grades K-3. A Level 2 I Can Read book.

GREENWILLOW BOOKS, 1993,
64 PAGES



'DOG LOVES BOOKS'
By Louise Yates

For the Love of Books

When Dog opens a bookstore, he finds customers a bit scarce. In an effort to keep busy, he delves into the books on his shelves and discovers that he's never bored or alone. Straightforward and sweet, this book is a celebration of the love of books.

RED FOX, 2010, 32 PAGES



Ian Kane
is a U.S. Army veteran, filmmaker, and author.
He enjoys the great outdoors and volunteering.

MOVIE REVIEWS

This week, we feature a nostalgic Japanese monster movie and a touching drama about a son reconnecting with his tall-story-telling father.

NEW RELEASE



'Shin Ultraman' (2023)

When gigantic monsters begin appearing in Japan, the government establishes a special unit called the SSSP to combat these malevolent threats. As the strange beasts continue to wreak havoc across the country, a mysterious silver-clad giant dubbed Ultraman enters the fray.

While this film's main characters are a little on the dull side, the action-packed battle sequences are absolutely incredible—deftly combining retro special effects with today's state-of-the-art CGI. It's a fun, nostalgic homage to the monster mash days of yore.

ACTION | ADVENTURE | DRAMA

Release Date:
Jan. 11, 2023 (United States)

Director:
Shinji Higuchi

Starring:
Takumi Saitoh,
Masami Nagasawa,
Hidetoshi Nishijima

Running Time:
1 hour, 52 minutes

Not Rated

Where to Watch:
Theaters

★★★★★

A HUMOROUS JOURNEY OF SELF-DISCOVERY



'Sullivan's Travels' (1942)

A big-time Hollywood director (Joel McCrea) is tired of making trivial films and sets out to make something

with more impact. His plan involves donning the guise of a vagrant to get real-life experience for his next movie.

This film isn't only fast-paced and full of adventure, but it's

also filled with plenty of humor, romance, and scathing commentary on the film industry.

ADVENTURE | COMEDY | DRAMA

Release Date:
Feb. 6, 1942

Director:
Preston Sturges

Starring:
Joel McCrea,
Veronica Lake,
Robert Warwick

Running Time:
1 hour, 30 minutes

Not Rated

Where to Watch:
Apple TV, DirecTV, Vudu

★★★★★

FAMILY PICK

'Big Fish' (2004)

In this charming film, Will Bloom (Billy Crudup) is struggling to get to know his estranged, dying father, Ed Bloom (the older man played by Albert Finney and the younger version by Ewan McGregor). However, Will can't seem to get past Ed's vast repertoire of fantastical stories.

This magical tale (mostly told through flashbacks) of humanity, imagination, and perspective, coupled with director Tim Burton's penchant for otherworldly visuals, is sure to captivate



viewers. It's a one-of-a-kind film that can also stimulate existential inquiry.

ADVENTURE | DRAMA | FANTASY

Release Date:
Jan. 9, 2004

Director:
Tim Burton

Starring:
Ewan McGregor,
Albert Finney, Billy Crudup

Running Time:
2 hours, 5 minutes

MPAA Rating:
PG-13

Where to Watch:
DirecTV, Vudu, Starz

★★★★★

AN INSPIRING ROAD MOVIE

'Chef' (2014)

Carl Casper (Jon Favreau) is a success: He's the head chef at a posh Los Angeles restaurant and gets along with his staff. However, he's constantly at odds with the owner, Riva (Dustin Hoffman), who stifles his creativity. One day, Carl decides to make a drastic change. How will it affect his life?

This is an entertaining and humorous film that's part road movie and part drama. Ultimately, however, it's about taking chances in one's life



in order to be happy. It's also about family reconciliation.

ADVENTURE | COMEDY | DRAMA

Release Date:
May 30, 2014

Director:
Jon Favreau

Starring:
Jon Favreau,
Robert Downey Jr.,
Scarlett Johansson

Running Time:
1 hour, 54 minutes

MPAA Rating: R

Where to Watch:
HBO Max, Redbox, DirecTV

★★★★★



How to Be a Great Co-Worker

In addition to getting your job done right, make the workplace congenial

We spend an enormous amount of time with our co-workers during the work week, so make a conscious decision to be the one who makes the effort to establish—and maintain—good relationships with them.

By Bill Lindsey

1 Be Nice

Regardless of whether you work in a busy office or toil from home, it's important to establish and maintain good relations with your co-workers. You don't need to be their best friend, but being pleasant to them when your paths cross in real life or via digital correspondence benefits both parties by demonstrating good manners and respect. It is always easier to approach someone for help when you have a history of being nice to them, and vice versa.



2 Be Helpful

As you interact with your co-workers, take it a step beyond simply nodding as you pass in the hall to offering to help them with projects, as long as it is OK with your boss for you to do so. They may decline your offer, but will most likely appreciate the gesture. Help new associates learn the office protocols or how to use proprietary apps that may be a bit confusing when first encountered. Help clean up after office birthday parties, too.

3 Solve Problems

We are all human; if you suspect a co-worker is having a rough time at work or at home, discreetly offer them support by finding a quiet time to let them know you are available should they need help. If you notice something being done in a manner that might be easily improved, instead of barging in like a know-it-all and announcing, "You're doing it wrong," diplomatically offer your suggestion to the boss. If it turns out it's your process that could be improved upon, accept the assistance graciously.

4 Be Discreet

Office politics and gossip erode productivity and can lead to tension among co-workers. If an office gossip tries to engage you in a negative conversation, change the subject or politely excuse yourself by explaining that you need to get ready for a meeting. By removing yourself from the situation, you eliminate the chance of fallout in the event that HR or your boss becomes aware. If you discover that you are the topic of gossip, discreetly advise your boss so he or she can deal with it.

5 Be Respectful

Work as a team, appreciating the skills each co-worker brings to the project. Respect your supervisors and managers, as long as they treat you in an appropriate manner; keep in mind that respect is earned, not automatically given. If you have a difficult relationship with a co-worker or your supervisor, consider discussing it with their boss or HR, but make sure you have all the facts right. Sometimes it's best to leave a toxic workplace and find a new job elsewhere.

Courageous Reporting

We believe that investigating and exposing the truth is the only way that we can remain safe and free

CROSSFIRE HURRICANE

ON MAY 25, 2017, The Epoch Times published an article headlined "Despite Allegations, No Evidence of Trump–Russia Collusion Found." The article detailed that—despite a media frenzy at the time—no actual evidence had been uncovered that President Donald Trump or anyone associated with his campaign had colluded with Russia to influence the 2016 presidential election.

OUR REPORTING was proven accurate with the conclusion of the investigation by special counsel Robert Mueller.

NOT ONLY DID WE NOT BUY INTO the false narrative that Trump colluded with Russia, but we have also been a leader in reporting on the irregular and apparently politicized nature of the FBI's investigation of the Trump campaign. During the past five years, we have published dozens of articles on the topic, many of them exclusive.



ELECTION INTEGRITY

FOLLOWING THE 2020 ELECTION, The Epoch Times was at the forefront of investigating and reporting on the questions surrounding the integrity of the election. Through our fact-based and independent reporting, we were able to uncover multiple irregularities.



ORIGINS OF COVID-19

ON APRIL 15, 2020, The Epoch Times published its documentary "Tracking Down the Origin of Wuhan Coronavirus." The film, which received over 100 million views, explored the origins of the virus, including the possibility of a lab leak. It presents scientific data and interviews with top scientists and national security experts.



YEARS AFTER THE RELEASE of this groundbreaking documentary, the possibility of a lab leak is considered by government officials and experts as the most likely explanation for the virus's spread.

CHINA THREAT

SINCE ITS INCEPTION in the year 2000, The Epoch Times has been at the forefront of reporting on the infiltration of the United States by the Chinese Communist Party. Numerous times over the years, we've broken major China-related stories ahead of other news organizations. In 2003, The Epoch Times was the first media outlet to systematically and continuously report on the spread of SARS, well ahead of most other Western media. We were also the first to report on state-sponsored forced organ harvesting in China—one of the most underreported atrocities of our time—in



which prisoners of conscience are killed for their organs, which are then sold for profit on a large scale.

THE EPOCH TIMES also published the editorial series "Nine Commentaries on the Communist Party," revealing the true nature and history of the Communist Party and inspiring a movement that so far has seen more than 400 million Chinese people quit the Party and its affiliated organizations. Another of our series, "How the Specter of Communism Is Ruling Our World," systematically exposes the evil nature of communism, as well as the harm it has brought and continues to inflict on the United States and the world.

What Our Readers Say

“It’s a magazine that’s FOR the American people, not against.”

Vanessa Morrison, medical records clerk

“Well thought out material, thoroughly investigated, and I trust [the] sources.”

Gail F. Sauve, homemaker

“It is straightforward, rather than a lot of speculation or pontificating.”

Jan Hamilton, retired professional

“[Insight] reminds me that there are still a LOT of wonderful, good, and dedicated people in this country.”

Creed Haymond, surgeon

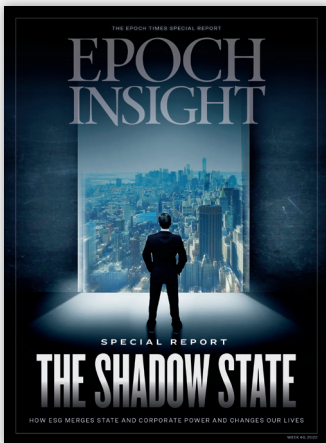
“Unbiased reporting. Short, impactful articles.”

Mark Naumann, photographer

“I can trust what I read and make up my own mind how I feel about the subject.”

Jim Edwards, retired

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