

EPOCH INSIGHT



**ANTI - MANDATE
HOLLYWOOD
SPEAKS UP**

BY ALICE GIORDANO



Anti-Mandate Hollywood Speaks Up

IN THIS EDITION, WE GET A GLIMPSE BEHIND the curtain at the celebrities who are at the forefront of the fight against vaccine mandates in Hollywood.

Perhaps the most significant statement so far came from Woody Harrelson in a recent "Saturday Night Live" monologue.

"The movie goes like this: The biggest drug cartels in the world get together and buy up all the media and all the politicians, and force all the people in the world to stay locked in their homes—and people only can come out if they take the cartels' drugs and keep taking them over and over," Harrelson said about a fictional script he had read.

Several actors told Epoch Insight reporter Alice Giordano that they have been shunned from roles and locked out of union activities because they chose not to get the COVID-19 vaccine or have decided to speak out against the mandates.

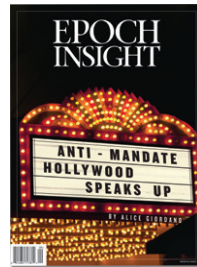
One actor, Rockmond Dunbar, filed a federal civil rights lawsuit against Walt Disney Co. after being fired from the set of Fox's popular TV show "9-1-1" for refusing the jab. His efforts to seek medical and religious exemptions were rejected.

Another actor said SAG-AFTRA, the union that represents film and TV actors and other media professionals, "is no longer running like a member-run union but rather a tyranny."

Despite mandates being dropped all over the country, SAG-AFTRA recently decided to extend COVID-19 vaccine orders and other protocols for members.

Read more in this week's edition about those in Hollywood who are pushing back against the mandates.

JASPER FAKKERT
Editor-in-chief



ON THE COVER

Hollywood actors are speaking out against the ongoing COVID-19 vaccine mandates imposed on their industry.

VALLARIEE/GETTY IMAGES

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GENERAL INQUIRIES, LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
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ADVERTISING
ADVERTISENOW@EPOCHTIMES.COM

(USPS21-800) IS PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE EPOCH MEDIA GROUP, 9550 FLAIR DR. SUITE 411, EL MONTE, CA 91731-2922. PERIODICAL POSTAGE PAID AT EL MONTE, CA, AND ADDITIONAL MAILING OFFICES. **POSTMASTER:** SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO THE EPOCH TIMES, 229 W. 28TH STREET, FLOOR 5, NEW YORK, NY 10001.

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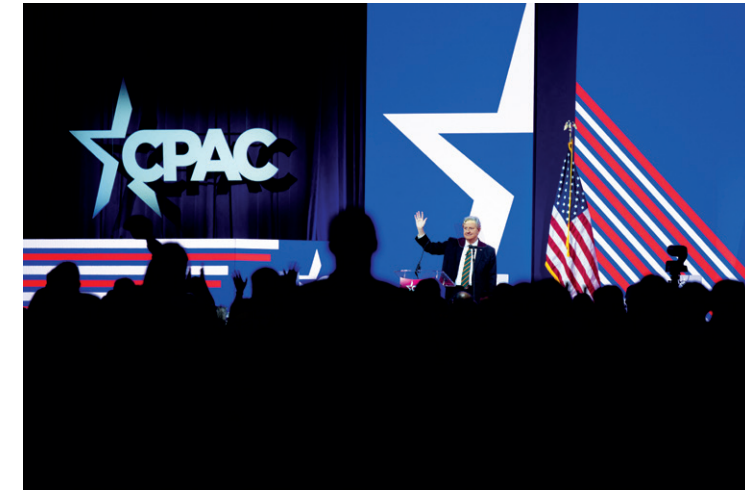
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This year's Conservative Political Action Conference will run from March 2 to 4 in National Harbor, Md. The conference is held by the Conservative Political Action Coalition, the nation's oldest conservative grassroots organization.

BRENDAN SMIALOWSKI/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

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A few tips that can ensure your dog is welcome almost anywhere.



SPOTLIGHT

Liberation Day

PILOTS OF THE ROYAL SAUDI AIR FORCE
Hawks aerobatic team perform during a show in Kuwait City, Kuwait, on Feb. 26, marking the day when Kuwait was liberated from Iraqi occupation in 1991.

PHOTO BY YASSER AL-ZAYYAT/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



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The Week



The site of the Feb. 3 derailment of a Norfolk Southern train carrying hazardous waste in East Palestine, Ohio, on Feb. 23.

PHOTO BY ALAN FREED/REUTERS

Train Derailment, Toxic Chemical Spill in Ohio 52

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“The threat of the socialist, neo-Marxist, communist ideology is very present.”

Rep. María Elvira Salazar

30 MILLION Americans on March 1 lost pandemic-era food stamp benefits that had increased their monthly allotment by \$95 per month on average.

“[The fentanyl crisis] is an epidemic that’s been unleashed on purpose by the Sinaloa and the new generation Jalisco cartels.”



Attorney General Merrick Garland, during a Judiciary Committee hearing

1.2 MILLION people in Los Angeles County who are ineligible to vote or who were inactive have been removed from the voter rolls, officials told Judicial Watch.

60%

of U.S. adults were living paycheck to paycheck as of January, although that’s down from 64 percent in January 2022, according to a report by LendingClub and Pymnts.



3,000 AFFECTED

The Texas Department of Public Safety has begun notifying at least 3,000 Asian Texans whose driver’s licenses were sent to a Chinese organized crime group because of a security lapse.

70%—Eli Lilly and Co., the largest U.S. manufacturer of insulin, has announced that prices for the company’s most commonly prescribed insulins will be reduced by as much as 70 percent later this year.

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The iconic Cinderella Castle in Disney World’s Magic Kingdom in Orlando, Fla., on Feb. 8.

FLORIDA

DeSantis Signs Bill Ending Disney’s ‘Corporate Kingdom’

FLORIDA GOV. RON DESANTIS has consigned Walt Disney World’s self-governing status to the historical dustbin as he signed legislation setting up a new board to govern the central Florida property.

The new legislation means Disney will no longer have governmental powers, including the right to tax, to avoid state building and fire codes, to avoid state regulatory reviews and approvals, to issue tax-exempt bonds, and to operate its own utility and emergency services within the entertainment company’s 25,000-acre property that straddles Orange and Osceola counties.

The measure, which will take effect in June, renames the Reedy Creek Improvement District as the Central Florida Tourism Oversight District. Its five supervisors will be appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Florida Senate.

The new district will continue the old district’s functions but under a new organizational structure, and it will remain exempt from property taxes, a detail that has irked some.

VACCINES

CDC Spreads False Information About COVID-19 Vaccine Safety

A TOP CENTERS for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) official gave false information about COVID-19 vaccine safety to the agency’s vaccine advisory panel, and a spokesperson for the agency refused to correct the misinformation.

Dr. Tom Shimabukuro, director of the CDC’s Immunization Safety Office, gave a false statement when he said that “no safety signals were detected for ischemic stroke for the primary series or monovalent boosters for Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines in U.S. and global monitoring,” during a Feb. 24 presentation to the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices.

Previously, the CDC identified ischemic stroke as a safety signal following Moderna and Pfizer vaccination after analyzing reports sent to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System, which the agency co-manages.

A CDC spokesperson doubled down on the false claim when contacted for comment by The Epoch Times.

CONGRESS

US Failed in Pandemic Response, Experts Tell Congress

THE UNITED STATES made multiple mistakes in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including widespread lockdowns and the aggressive promotion of faulty vaccines, experts testified to a new congressional panel.

“During the last three years, we have seen the worst public health mistakes in history,” Martin Kulldorff, a professor of medicine on leave from Harvard University, told the House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic in Washington.

The mistakes included not crafting policies focused on protecting those highest at risk—the elderly and otherwise infirm—and the denial and downplaying of post-infection immunity, he said.

He and Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, a professor of medicine at Stanford University, are two of three authors of the Great Barrington Declaration, which in 2020 called for focused protection of those at high risk while allowing others to live their lives normally.

Instead, U.S. officials backed harsh restrictions such as the forced closure of schools and businesses, as well as the mandated vaccination of tens of millions of Americans.

Bhattacharya told the panel that there needed to be an “honest, scientifically minded evaluation” of the pandemic response, and that “there is near universal agreement that what we did failed.”



Dr. Martin Kulldorff, professor of medicine at Harvard University, on Oct. 23, 2021.



U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Linda Thomas-Greenfield speaks to the media in New York on March 1, 2021.

UN

UN Promotes Anti-Israel, Pro-Beijing Policies: US Ambassador

THE UNITED NATIONS consistently demonstrates an anti-Israel bias and is overly beholden to authoritarian regimes including China and Russia, according to testimony during a House subcommittee hearing.

U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Linda Thomas-Greenfield testified that the international body continually sought to place Israel at a disadvantage and favored actions that undermined Israeli security and sovereignty.

“The U.N. is replete with anti-Israel actions and bodies, including disproportionate resolutions against Israel across the U.N. system,” Thomas-Greenfield told members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs.

UK

Increased Risk of Adverse Events After COVID-19 Vaccination Among Naturally Immune: Study

HEALTH CARE WORKERS who had post-infection immunity reported more adverse events after receiving Pfizer’s COVID-19 vaccine than those without natural immunity, researchers in England said.



Syringes filled with doses of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine in Sheffield, England, on Dec. 15, 2021.

Their study revealed a “significant association” between natural immunity and one or more moderate/severe adverse events after doses one, two, and three of Pfizer’s vaccine among hospital workers in northeast England.

The moderate to severe adverse events included diarrhea, fatigue, and fever.

TURKEY

Erdogan Indicates Turkey Elections to Be Held in May

PRESIDENT RECEP TAYYIP ERDOGAN has indicated that elections in Turkey will be held on May 14, sticking to his previous plan for the vote to proceed just over three months after a devastating earthquake that killed more than 45,000 people.

Doubts have been expressed over election authorities’ ability to make logistical arrangements for those affected in the quake zone, home to some 14 million people, to vote.



Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan speaks in Ankara, Turkey, on March 1.

WORLD

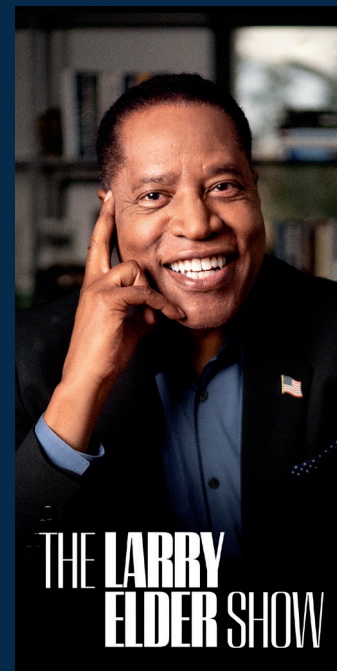
More Americans Work Remotely Compared to Europeans and Asians

A GREAT DIVERGENCE is occurring in return-to-office habits, as half of American workers still work remotely while their counterparts in Asia and Europe have largely returned to the office.

Offices in the United States are still at about half capacity three years after the onset of the pandemic, with occupancy rates at 40 to 60 percent of pre-2020 levels, varying by month or location, according to The Wall Street Journal, which cites data from property-services firm JLL.

In Europe and the Middle East, offices are at 70 to 90 percent levels, while Asia has occupancy rates of 80 to 110 percent, as more people are currently in the office in some cities than before the pandemic, JLL stated.

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The Week in Photos



1. People on their way to vote during Nigeria's presidential and general election, in Lagos on Feb. 25. Bola Tinubu won as the new president-elect on March 1.



2. A French paratrooper parachutes from an A400M aircraft during a large-scale military drill in Castres, France, on Feb. 25.



3. An activist of the Tibetan Youth Congress is detained by security personnel outside the Chinese Embassy during a protest against Chinese foreign minister Qin Gang, who attended the G-20 foreign ministers' meeting, in New Delhi on March 1.

4. The Roman Forum and the Colosseum in Rome on Feb. 27.

5. Officials lay flowers at the Dokwerker statue during the commemoration of the general strike of February 1941 in Amsterdam, on Feb. 25. The strike was the only open, massive protest against the anti-Jewish measures of the Nazis in occupied Europe.

6. A skier makes his way through a snowy landscape near the village of Kruen, Germany, on Feb. 27.



6.



4.



5.

Ford's electric F-150 Lightning on the production line at the company's Rouge Electric Vehicle Center in Dearborn, Mich., on Sept. 8, 2022.

PHOTO BY JEFF KOWALSKY/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

PARTNERSHIP

FORD'S NEW DEAL WITH CHINESE COMPANY

BIPARTISAN CONCERNS RAISED OVER
ECONOMIC AND NATIONAL SECURITY RISKS

BY TERRI WU

FORD'S NEW DEAL WITH A CHINESE electric vehicle (EV) battery manufacturer has triggered bipartisan concern over economic and national security risks.

The iconic American automaker on Feb. 13 announced that a new \$3.5 billion plant will be built in Marshall, Michigan, 100 miles west of Detroit, to produce lithium-iron-phosphate batteries, better known as LFP, a type of battery cheaper but less energy-dense than the nickel-cobalt-manganese chemistry that currently dominates the market.

A wholly owned subsidiary will own the factory and employ the workers, Ford said, while China's Contemporary Amperex Technology Co. Ltd. (CATL), under a licensing agreement, will provide the EV battery technology, some equipment, and workers. CATL is the world's largest manufacturer of EV batteries, known for its dominance in LFP batteries.

The deal came amid heightened concern across the political spectrum over the Chinese regime's efforts to subvert the United States to overtake it both economically and militarily. The deal was announced not long after the United States shot down a Chinese spy balloon that had hovered over sensitive military sites across the country, drawing widespread outrage.

While Ford and Michigan officials have touted the deal as an economic boon for the state, with Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, a Democrat, saying the expected creation of 2,500 jobs will "build on Michigan's economic momentum," others have expressed alarm over the U.S. automaker's collaboration with a Chinese firm, given the communist regime's ultimate ambitions to supplant American industries in the global market.

That's the reason Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin, a Republican, late last year pulled the commonwealth out of the bid for housing the factory.

Youngkin called Ford's battery plant a "Trojan horse" for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to undermine U.S. efforts to strengthen the American auto industry.

"While Ford is an iconic American company, it became clear that this proposal would serve as a front for the Chinese Communist Party, which could compromise our economic security and Virginians' personal privacy,"



Youngkin's spokesperson previously told The Epoch Times in an email.

Tax Credits

Ford expects production to begin in 2026, with the plant estimated to produce enough batteries for 400,000 EVs each year. Ford will introduce LFP batteries on Mustang Mach-E this year and on the F-150 Lightning in 2024, using CATL batteries from China, before the plant opens in Michigan in three years' time.

The automaker expects that the deal will benefit from federal tax credits for EVs under the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). Under the new law, customers of EV vehicles can receive up to \$7,500 in "clean vehicle credit," with the amount dependent on whether the vehicle, batteries, and battery components are made and sourced from the United States.

This credit won't be available for vehicles with components manufactured or assembled by a "foreign entity of concern," generally a reference to China, Iran, Russia, and North Korea.

Ford expects that buyers would initially be eligible for half of the \$7,500 in tax credits,

A Contemporary Amperex Technology Co. Ltd. (CATL) display illustrating battery cells, modules, and packs, at an auto show in Frankfurt, Germany, on Sept. 11, 2019. CATL is the world's largest manufacturer of EV batteries.

with the possibility of getting the full amount over time based on where the firm sources battery minerals. The Treasury Department has said it would release the proposed guidance on "foreign entity of concern" and other terms in March.

A more lucrative tax credit, however, is the new advanced manufacturing tax credit for manufacturers at \$45 per kilowatt-hour tied to EV battery cells and modules. Ford confirmed to The Epoch Times that it expected the new battery plant to qualify for the production tax credit, although the amount has yet to be determined. Unlike the credit for consumers, the IRA's production tax credit doesn't have a "foreign entity of concern" exclusion clause.

According to Nick Iacovella, a spokesperson for the Coalition for a Prosperous America (CPA), the production tax credit amount for the battery plant could reach \$1 billion, depending on the exact terms of the licensing agreement, given the factory's annual capacity of 35 gigawatt-hours, or 35 million kilowatt-hours. CPA is an advocacy organization representing exclusively manufacturers that have productions in the United States. Ford is not a member of the CPA.

A partner at a global law firm in Washington who specializes in national security litigation said that the underlying viability of the deal rested on access to the IRA tax credit. Therefore, Ford would have structured the arrangement in a way to ensure eligibility and thus the ability to pay CATL with pots of money that would not have been available without the tax credit.

In this way, the lawyer believes that the arrangement is in effect a joint venture.

"At the end of the day, [CATL] is a Chinese company with Chinese nationals and ties to the Chinese Communist Party. And they are going to be working here in the United States under the cover of Ford, one of the most iconic U.S. brands in the world, even though the behavior, the technology transfer, and the financial incentives are all the same as if it were Ford and CATL working side by side in a 50-50 joint venture," the attorney source told The Epoch Times on condition of anonymity, as his firm does business in China.

Diana Furchtgott-Roth, director of the Center for Energy, Climate, and Environment at the Washington think tank The Heritage Foundation, said that regardless of the tax

credit amount, "it is still a misuse of American taxpayer funds" because "these credits were intended to go to United States operations, not Chinese operations."

"The biggest national security concern is that we are becoming dependent on China for an important element of our transportation," Furchtgott-Roth told The Epoch Times.

"President Biden and the state of California and other states have aspirational goals of 100 percent sales of electric vehicles in 2035. And if China continues to dominate the electric battery market, then we are going to be dependent on China for an important component of our transportation."

Aided by the CCP

Under Beijing's national industrial plan, known as "Made in China 2025," the communist regime aims to dominate global high-tech manufacturing, and EV battery technology is one such strategic industry.

China's cabinet-like State Council currently has a 15-year development plan for the new energy automobile industry until 2035, after executing an initial eight-year plan from 2012 to 2020. Deep integration into the global supply chain is mentioned in the plan's "fundamental principles" section.

CATL currently supplies automakers such as General Motors, Ford, and Tesla. The Chinese battery giant is an offshoot of another tech company, Amperex Technology Ltd. (ATL), founded by CATL Chairman Zeng Yuqun in 1999.

ATL made batteries for laptops and MP3 players using technology licensed from U.S. companies, according to a Quartz report. After being acquired by a Japanese company, TDK, in 2005, ATL pivoted toward smartphone batteries. Zeng continued managing ATL post-acquisition.

In 2006, ATL began to look at EV batteries. And again, the company acquired technology licenses from the United States for a jumpstart, according to Quartz. The company was thrust onto the national stage in China as a battery supplier for the electric buses showcased during the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

After that, Zeng decided to focus on car batteries and launched CATL in 2011. CATL is completely independent from ATL, which remains in the TDK group.

Without foreign competition, CATL rose to dominance in China, where most of the

SEAN GALLUP/BETTY IMAGES

world's electric cars have been sold since 2015. No foreign providers had access to the Chinese EV battery market before June 2019.

In 2015, when the Chinese regime introduced a list of government-recommended automobile battery suppliers, CATL was at the top position.

In 2017, CATL took the world's top spot in global EV battery market share at 18 percent, having risen from below 7 percent in 2015, according to Seoul-based market research firm SNE Research. It has been the top leader since, occupying 37 percent of the global market share in 2022.

During the same years of enjoying a shielded competitive environment, CATL also received generous capital injections through the Chinese regime's subsidy programs. When CATL went public on the Shenzhen Stock Exchange in 2018, it disclosed in its prospectus that it had received a total of 1 billion yuan (\$155 million) from 2015 to 2017 in subsidies from central and local authorities.

These subsidies are a drop in the ocean in the regime's overall financial assistance to the domestic EV industry. According to a July 2018 report by Chinese state-run publication The Time Weekly, Beijing provided the industry with subsidies of at least 59 billion yuan (\$8.6 billion) in 2015 and 83 billion yuan (\$12.1 billion) in 2016, based on incomplete central government data and the publication's estimates.

Since 2018, Zeng has served as a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), a political advisory body to the communist regime. Earlier this year, Zeng's committee membership was extended for another five years, until 2028.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) calls the CPPCC a "patriot united front organization," a reference to the regime's "United Front" system that involves a network of bodies that seek to expand the Party's influence both inside and outside of China.

In 2016, Zeng was awarded the lifetime title of "state council expert with special allowance," one of the CCP's highest-level recognitions for technical expertise.

Ford Deal Boosts CATL

With Ford's adoption of LFP batteries, a technology monopolized by Chinese producers is one step closer to dominating the global market.

"The biggest national security concern is that we are becoming dependent on China for an important element of our transportation."

Diana Furchtgott-Roth, director, Center for Energy, Climate, and Environment, The Heritage Foundation

Batteries with nickel-cobalt-manganese chemistry, better known as NCM, are currently used by most EVs outside of China.

While cheaper, LFP batteries' energy density is about 70 percent of NCM batteries', meaning fewer miles traveled with one full charge. NCM batteries also perform better in cold temperatures and when carrying heavier loads. However, LFP batteries have a longer lifespan, allowing more than 2,000 charge cycles, compared with NCMs' 1,000 to 2,000 cycles.

For LFP batteries to dominate the global market, Chinese automakers and Tesla, which use LFP, would need to start exporting en masse, or Western carmakers, such as Ford, would need to introduce LFP in their entry-level EV models, according to a December report by Adamas Intelligence, a critical minerals market research firm.

Before its agreement with CATL, Ford had been relying on NCM technology for its EVs.

The Ford-CATL deal happened at a time when access to cheaper EV batteries was essential to revamping the 120-year-old brand.

Ford CEO Jim Farley announces that the company will be partnering with CATL to create a multibillion-dollar electric vehicle battery plant, in Romulus, Mich., on Feb. 13.



FROM LEFT: BILL PUGLIANO/GETTY IMAGES; STRINBERG/REUTERS



A worker on a lithium-ion battery production line at a plant in Huzhou, Zhejiang Province, China. Most of the world's electric cars have been sold in China since 2015.

On Feb. 14, Ford announced that it had halted the production and shipment of its F-150 Lightning electric pickup after it confirmed that a defective battery had caused one of the vehicles to catch fire earlier this month. The company said it believed it had identified the root cause of the problem and would need to adjust the truck's battery production process. A South Korean company supplied the battery at issue.

"Ford is trying desperately to get ahead in the EV space. So for them having issues already coming off the [F-150 Lightning] line as we're talking about integrating the Chinese Communist Party technology into their upcoming lines, it's kind of a rocky foundation to start on," said a U.S. state official who has investigated the Ford-CATL deal. The official spoke to The Epoch Times on condition of anonymity because the person wasn't authorized to speak publicly on the issue.

The production halt came a day after Ford announced its partnership with CATL and two weeks after its disappointing fourth-quarter earnings release. At the earnings call, Ford CEO Jim Farley told analysts that the company's \$2 billion loss in 2022 was due to "cost and especially continued supply chain issues." "These are the simple

facts, and to say I'm frustrated is an understatement because the year could have been so much more for us at Ford," he added.

At a conference on Feb. 15, Ford chief financial officer John Lawler said that the company's annual cost is about \$7 billion to \$8 billion higher than its traditional competitors'. Hence, having access to cheaper EV batteries is critical to Ford's transformation, and LFP is the cheaper choice.

The state official, like others, raised concerns that CATL might lead Ford down a path that would mean more supply chain dependence on China and loss of global competitiveness in the long run.

"This [LFP battery chemistry] isn't really the direction that we're going in other parts of the American market. And so, the question is, why is Ford partnering in this manner on something that isn't the direction that others are taking?"

Bipartisan Concerns

While the CCP's media outlets have hailed the Ford deal as an "international marriage" announced on Valentine's Day local time, U.S. officials worry about the implications of the new partnership.

"These autonomous vehicles and electric vehicles are at the very heart of 'Made



CATL's chairman Zeng Yuqun has served as a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference since 2018 and is due to serve until 2028.

in China 2025,' which is Beijing's economic policy to dominate the world in tech—not just compete, but to dominate the world in tech and become a sole supplier of leading tech, robotics, EVs in the world," former national security adviser Robert O'Brien told The Epoch Times.

"Ford is now becoming a partner in 'China 2025.'"

On the same day as Ford's announcement of the deal, Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) called for

STR/AFP/VEGETTY IMAGES

an immediate review of the licensing agreement by the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States, a federal panel tasked with scrutinizing foreign acquisitions for national security risks.

In a letter to the secretaries of the Treasury, Energy, and Transportation departments, Rubio sought pledges from the Biden administration not to funnel federal dollars to CATL, a state-supported entity that he called a "CCP national champion." He also

A worker checks lithium batteries for electric cars at a factory in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, China, on March 12, 2021. No foreign providers had access to the Chinese EV battery market before June 2019.

asked the administration to provide answers on whether CATL has obtained U.S. technology illicitly, the company's potential ties to the CCP military, and any involvement it may have with forced labor.

Sen. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.), chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, also expressed concerns.

"Senator Manchin has been clear about his grave concerns about vehicle supply chain reliance on China," a spokesperson told Politico last month. "Ford has serious questions to answer before Senator Manchin can fully evaluate the business partnership."

On Feb. 16, Bloomberg reported that Beijing intended to scrutinize the Ford-CATL agreement, wary that Ford might somehow obtain CATL's battery technology. In response, Senate Intelligence Chairman Mark Warner (D-Va.) called Beijing's move "ironic," demonstrating the regime's "hypocrisy" given the CCP's own extensive track record of economic espionage.

"I have huge concerns about the Chinese Communist Party's influence on many of the companies that come from China," Warner said in a January interview with the Richmond Times-Dispatch. "[The] CCP has the ability to override any company in China, and those companies in China have to be responsible to the Communist Party, not their shareholders, not their customers."

Iacovella, of the Coalition for a Prosperous America, echoed this sentiment.

"Basically, any Chinese company can be weaponized against the United States by the Chinese government," Iacovella said.

Iacovella said the CCP has strategically selected industries—battery technology being one of them—that are critical to the 21st-century economy, and it has "developed a very complex and quite successful plan to dominate the global supply chain for those industries."

"China is trying to control and monopolize all of those industries to the detriment of the United States so that we become wholly dependent on them. In a sense, this is economic warfare," he said.

"So this brings us back to the taxpayer question, why would we have taxpayers subsidizing those efforts through tax credits? And that's the key issue here."

CATL didn't respond to a request for comment. ■

\$7,500

CREDITS

UNDER THE INFLATION

Reduction Act, customers of EV vehicles can receive up to \$7,500 in a "clean vehicle credit."

\$1

BILLION

THE PRODUCTION

tax credit amount for Ford's new electric vehicle battery plant could reach \$1 billion, according to a CPA spokesperson.

37%

CATL HELD

37 percent of the global EV battery market share in 2022; it has been the industry's top producer since 2017.

DROUGHT

CALIFORNIA'S LAKE SHASTA

DOWN BUT NOT OUT

City officials say cyclical drought normal, not due to 'climate change'

BY ALLAN STEIN

A boat sits near a drying shoreline on Lake Shasta in Lakehead, Calif., on Oct. 16, 2022. Since 2020, the lake has been in what many locals consider a cyclical dry spell.

PHOTO BY JOSH EDELSON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

SHASTA LAKE, CALIF.— Longtime bait-and-tackle shop owner Bob Braz has seen droughts come and go at Lake Shasta, nestled in California's upper Central Valley, but 1976–77 was the worst on record.

The two-year drought left the lake's water level 238 feet below its 1,067-foot mark above sea level at total capacity, exposing vast swaths of rocky lake bed and debris.

"That was pretty bad," Braz said, 71, holding up a laminated newspaper article from 1977 now yellowed with time.

One startling picture showed a sprawling lakebed that looked as dry as the Mojave desert.

"The thing that made it so bad was you didn't have any boat launches. You couldn't launch your boat. And when the [water] level is down, it's hard on the elderly and the disabled," Braz said.

"Often, they'll stay home because launching a boat is physically demanding."

Eventually, the rain started falling with the region's variable climate, and Lake Shasta's water level rose again.

That's the natural progression, Braz said. Braz has owned The Fishen Hole bait-and-tackle shop in the city of Shasta Lake for 38 years.

There are wet years, and there are dry years, he said.

"We don't know what the future holds, but we still have half of February, March, April, May—those can be awfully rainy months," Braz said.

"There's still a chance of the water coming over the top of the dam and flooding out [nearby] Cottonwood."

Rain, Rain, Don't Go Away

Since 2020, Lake Shasta has been in what many locals consider a cyclical dry spell with no consistent sign of ending, even with the torrential rains in January raising the lake's water level by 68 feet.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the lake stood at just under 993 feet elevation and 59 percent capacity as of Feb. 18.

"We go in and out of droughts all the

time," Braz told The Epoch Times. "Sometimes, when the lake's down, the out-of-towners will get on the computer."

"If they see the lake is down so far, many will cancel and go to Disneyland [instead], or whatever."

Braz believes the media clamor over climate change is "just a big hoax" regarding Lake Shasta, given what he considers a historical circular drought pattern.

"I've lived here all my life. It's got nothing to do with the heat," Braz said.

By contrast, Lake Mead in southeastern Nevada has been mired in a catastrophic regional drought since 2000, down 143 feet from its peak, and is struggling at 28 percent capacity. The lake's surface elevation is 1,230 feet when full.

"I'VE LIVED HERE ALL MY LIFE. IT'S GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH THE HEAT."

Bob Braz, shop owner

Houseboat Capital

With 365 miles of pristine shoreline, Lake Shasta has earned the nickname "houseboat capital of the world." An estimated 350 houseboats are moored at six marinas or floating on the lake.

The lake owes its existence to the Shasta Dam, built between 1938 and 1945 to supply water and hydroelectric power to California's rich agricultural Central Valley, which produces roughly two-thirds of the nation's food.

Located about 10 miles north of Redding, Lake Shasta receives water from the Sacramento River, McCloud River, Pit River, and Squaw Creek.

About 20 percent of California's water comes from the reservoir.

Seasonal rains supply most of the lake's volume during wet years, while less than 18 percent comes from melting snow from Mount Shasta to the north.



Bob Braz, owner of The Fishen Hole bait-and-tackle shop, shows an old photograph depicting the extent of the 1976-77 drought that crippled much of Lake Shasta, in the City of Lake Shasta, Calif., on Feb. 15.

ALLAN STEIN/THE EPOCH TIMES

The dam and reservoir are critical to the Central Valley Project (CVP), a federal power and water management program under reclamation bureau supervision.

The CVP relies on the dam primarily for flood control and to provide water for the U.S. Department of Fisheries to monitor protected salmon populations.

Donald Bader, area manager of the bureau's Northern California area office at Lake Shasta, said California droughts tend to occur every six or seven years, followed by periods of rainfall.

The drought of 2007 lasted three years, he said. The 2013 drought lasted a year longer.

"We have these blocks of multi-year droughts, and then we get these wet years in between," Bader said. "The winter precipitation is unpredictable."

On a clear day, the looming white peak of Mount Shasta is visible from the concrete gravity dam at Lake Shasta.

While clear days and blue skies at

the lake are spectacular, Bader said they signify rain isn't in the forecast.

He said that doesn't bode well for the cities, towns, and agricultural producers within the CVP that purchase water by allocation.

"Typically, we see 10 to 15 inches of rain each month," he said. "Last year, we got an inch of rain in January, and we barely got any more in February and March."

"We are very concerned. If we get past the middle of March [without rain], it's too late for us to recover" in 2023, Bader told The Epoch Times.

Bader said January was a great month for rainfall, "stacking up every day" with ground saturation around the lake, supplemented by the spring snowmelt.

"In the middle of January, we were very optimistic. A month later and we didn't get any rain at all. That's where I'm conservative in saying we're not out of the woods," Bader said.

"I've seen what it's doing too many times now."

Climate Climax

Shasta Lake Mayor Greg Watkins recalled the 1976–77 California drought as a climatic event that brought Lake Shasta's water level to its record lowest point at 238 feet below the crest.

Watkins said the drought of 2017–18 also saw water levels drop significantly, but the following year, the lake "rebounded hugely."

"We got 90 inches of rain" instead of the usual average of 60, he said.

In 2020, the lake received only 23 inches of rainfall—30 inches in 2021—with large areas of newly exposed shoreline appearing with their characteristic "bathtub ring" effect.

"Even if the lake is half empty, you can still get in a boat and go 30 miles up three different arms. There is so much lake left," Watkins said.

"It was getting pretty low in 2017 and 2018—in 2019, it filled to within 18 feet of the top. What did [the federal government] do? They started releasing the water at 70,000 cubic feet per second for 20 days. They dropped the lake 50 feet."

Watkins said he doesn't put stock in dire warnings of manmade climate change causing the lake to dry up and blow away.

"I would make nothing of it. It depends



(Left) A sign advises residents to conserve water in the city of Shasta Lake on Feb. 14. (Above) Lake Shasta Caverns' General Manager Matt Doyle says the drought's human impact is caused less by changes in the weather than by government resource management policies and environmental initiatives.

Lake Shasta Caverns National Natural Landmark's general manager says that the lake is in no immediate danger of going away—regardless of how dry it appears to climate activists—since the drought is 'cyclical.'

on ocean temperatures—el Nino and la Nina," two seasonal weather patterns bringing either lots of rain or very little.

"I just love the term 'atmospheric rivers.' It describes that there's a lot of moisture in the clouds, and that's what fills our rivers," Watkins said.

During periods of drought, lower allocations mean some communities have to do the same with less water.

In the city of Shasta Lake, with a population of 10,371, residents have been under Stage 2 municipal water restrictions to cope with the lower allocation in 2022 and have conserved accordingly.

"This year, they cut us back from 2,600 acre-feet per second to about 500," Watkins said. "They cut us 75 percent for our drinking water because we are what they call a junior water right

holder. We are dependent on Shasta Lake Dam water."

Some agricultural users were cut to zero, while the city of Shasta Lake had to purchase water from other sources "at a premium," said Shasta Lake City Manager Jessaca Lugo.

The city paid \$90 for an acre-foot of water before the drought. This year, the city will pay \$300, and \$500 in some cases, for water because of the smaller allocation.

"All it does is add a cost to an already disadvantaged community. Those are all things we must consider in our water rates," Lugo said.

Tough Balancing Act

Lugo said the drought's human impact is caused less by changes in the weather

than by government resource management policies and environmental initiatives.

Federal law requires the bureau to keep the lake's temperature at 56 degrees Fahrenheit to protect the endangered winter-run chinook salmon's habitat. The agency periodically releases colder water through the dam's spillway valves during the salmon spawning season.

Watkins said the Shasta Dam and Reservoir Enlargement Project, a federal program, would raise the dam's height by 18 1/2 feet, allowing for an additional 600,000 cubic acre-feet of water storage.

The Winnemem Wintu, an indigenous tribe, oppose the project, saying the dam's higher water level would submerge Dekkas Rock, used in annual tribal swimming ceremonies, Watkins said.

Watkins said the city purchased enough water in 2022 but at higher rates to ensure available supply despite mandatory cutbacks in consumption.

Many homeowners' lawns turned brown as a result of the restrictions, he said.

"The people conserved, but many said, 'Why are we conserving so much up here at the headwaters when they drive to LA and see green lawns?'"

Lugo said the city of Shasta Lake evolved from the dam's construction, through which the city acquired assets from the Shasta Public Utility District (SPUD).

"So when our city incorporated [in 1993], we also took the SPUD's assets. What we didn't get is we probably should have had senior water rights" and perhaps negotiated a more sizable yearly allocation of water, Lugo said.

"The state as a whole still needs to build more water storage. For the most part, we are a growing state. When you extract resources and not replace them, there is only so much water to go around our state."

When the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 and 2021 hit, Lake Shasta saw its water level drop even further, though fears of declining tourism revenues were offset by a steady influx of "COVID refugees" escaping the medical lockdowns in densely populated urban areas such as San Francisco and Los Angeles.

"During COVID, when people are trying to get out just to [get away], we saw a huge increase in tourism but not related to lake levels," Lugo said.

"The lower level made no difference," Watkins added. "There is still so much lake, even if you see the bathtub rings."

"January gave us a big storm. It was coming in at 58,000 cubic feet every second. It never came in over 8,000 or 12,000 cubic feet per second in the last three years."

Paradise Lost?

Having grown up in Los Angeles, Matt Doyle, Lake Shasta Caverns National



Jennifer Kernan, a server at the Old Mill Eatery and Smokehouse, says she was hopeful the rains would replenish much of Lake Shasta during the current drought, in Shasta Lake, Calif., on Feb. 14.

Natural Landmark general manager in Lakehead, has considered the lake his “paradise” for the past two decades.

Doyle said that he, too, views the drought of 2020 as a cyclical event that “ebbs and flows” with the irregular rhythm of nature.

“It does look low—and it is low—but there’s quite a bit more to it. I’ve seen it lower than we’ve had previously. In 2019, it was almost up to the top. Nobody talks about that,” Doyle said.

“At the same time, you must look at what California is. Traditionally, it’s always been a desert. We’ve had droughts that lasted hundreds of years.”

Doyle can say with absolute certainty that Lake Shasta is in no immediate danger of going away—regardless of how dry it appears to climate activists—since the drought is “cyclical.”

“We can only fill up the lake as much as Mother Nature gives us rain. We can only do so much,” Doyle said.

“Every time I hear a politician say ‘combat climate change,’ it’s like, the climate always changes. So, what do you want it to be? Seventy-five degrees all year round? You can’t control that. You have to have some flux.”

“This is something I’ve dealt with for the past 20 years. It’s the media spin. Yes, there are giant barren pictures [of the lake]. All they had to do was turn it around, and it disappeared.”

Doyle said that some problems associated with lake management are, for lack of a better term, political.

He said while California politicians are vocal about water scarcity, they “completely ignored the fact” that the federal government in 2021 dumped 800,000 acre-feet of water from Lake Shasta to protect the delta smelt, an endangered species.



(Above) Catamaran operator and tour bus driver Tim Lehman shares historical details of Lake Shasta Caverns while driving up the steep winding dirt road, on Feb. 14. (Right) Lehman ties down the Cavern Princess, one of two pontoon boats used to ferry visitors to the caverns.

“That’s bigger than most reservoirs, and it went straight into the ocean, all in the name of the delta smelt and [controlling water] salinity,” Doyle told The Epoch Times.

The lake can hold about 4.5 million cubic acre-feet of water at maximum capacity.

“I believe in science, which means science is correct until it’s proven wrong. Whether or not humans are doing this or it’s a natural cycle” is a matter for

debate, Doyle said.

Doyle said he remains hopeful but cautious about the lake at its lower water level. But the historical pattern is drought followed by rain.

“I’ve seen it rain heavily into May. We need a few weeks of good rain, and the lake will go up,” Doyle said.

“We always get concerned. The main reason is it is far more intensive in man-hours” at Lake Shasta Caverns, which conducts tours of the ancient caverns 800 feet above the lake.

Timothy Lehman is the captain of the Cavern Princess, one of two pontoon boats used to ferry visitors in 15-minute trips across the emerald lake to reach the caverns.

He also drives a tour bus up the winding switchback-filled dirt road to the visitor center and cavern entry.

Lehman said he started working at Lake Shasta Caverns in 2016 when the lake’s water level was low and getting lower.

“We were about 185 feet from the top,

the second lowest in the lake’s history,” he said. “This year, we’re down even farther than that. Pretty low.”

“Even if they drained [the lake] to its lowest point, there would still be a lot of water,” Lehman told The Epoch Times.

When the Cavern Princess had reached its destination, Lehman stepped off the gangway and tied the craft with a rope.

He then loaded a small group of tourists into the bus and drove them to the cavern entrance at the visitor center, where tour guide Dillon Caetano met them.

Inside the caverns felt like going back thousands of years through a subterranean landscape of stone columns called stalactites and stalagmites.

“Once every five years, this lake will fill up,” Caetano said. “I’m hoping for and anticipating 20 more feet. That would be awesome. Any water is good.”

“It never disappears. It gets low because it’s California.”

Still, Jennifer Kernan, a server who works at the Old Mill Eatery and Smokehouse in Shasta Lake, said the 2020 drought directly impacted boat ramp access.

“It was horrible. I was working out

there helping move docks,” Kernan told The Epoch Times. “I helped dig stairs in the sides of the hills for the customers” at the ramp at Bridge Bay.

“We were worried because last year we weren’t sure how much it would rain. We still have a lot of snowfall. So once that melts, we’ll be pretty good this season,” Kernan said.

“We’ll get a few years of it, and the lake will go back down again.”

Lacking a ground table or aquifer, Lugo said the city’s main benefit with the January storms was the complete saturation of the ground around the lake.

“So all these little tributaries are now feeding the lake. Last year, everything was dry,” she said.

“The ground is a big sponge. The sponge has to go up before the tributaries are full.”

The most telling damage caused by the drought has been the loss of trees and creeks where birds and small wildlife would come to drink.

“If you were a raccoon, you had to get to somebody’s dog water or go a mile further to a creek,” Watkins said.

“I had a hawk that tried to get into my horse tank. When birds get into a tank,

they can’t get out. Same with the ground squirrels.”

Watkins said he lost 10 acres and five “monster ponderosa pines” 120 years old at his house.

“I’ve fallen three and have three more to go,” Watkins said.

And the drought isn’t over yet even as demand for Lake Shasta’s water ramps up.

Water Wars

“Water is a very interesting subject in the state,” Doyle noted.

“It’s become a real political game regarding who controls the water. The water wars in California have always been here.”

Lugo said that until the state government implements more efficient and equitable management policies at Shasta Lake, “I feel like with the policies you see on a state level, we’re always going to be in a drought.”

“I don’t think we will ever use as much water as we want.”

Watkins summed up the situation with an old Mark Twain saying: “Whiskey is for drinking. Water is for fighting.”

“I may have the quote a little bit wrong,” Watkins said. “But it is so true.” ■

“EVEN IF THEY DRAINED [THE LAKE] TO ITS LOWEST POINT, THERE WOULD STILL BE A LOT OF WATER.”

Timothy Lehman, captain, Cavern Princess

ALL PHOTOS BY ALLAN STEIN/THE EPOCH TIMES

STATE LEGISLATION

Chickens May Yet Rule the Roost in Texas

Legislators introduce bills that aim to secure home-grown food sources

By Darlene McCormick Sanchez

TEXAS FAMILIES SHOULD BE allowed to keep chickens in their yards and gas stoves in their kitchens, according to Texas politicians. And several state lawmakers have introduced proposals to that effect during the 2023 Texas legislative session.

The bills are in response to the high price of chicken and eggs, exacerbated by inflation and a bird flu epidemic that ravaged the avian population.

It's also evidence of feathers ruffled by the Biden administration's war on oil and gas, one they've suggested could extend to banning gas stoves.

The chicken bill has bipartisan support, suggesting it could fly through the Texas Legislature. Four similar bills were filed by Democrat Rep. Philip Cortez, and three Republicans—Sen. Bob Hall, Rep. Briscoe Cain, and Rep. Brooks Landgraf.

The measures introduced by Landgraf and Cortez are more expansive—allowing for other fowl, rabbits, and plots for fruits and vegetables—much like the victory gardens tended during the World War II era by Americans determined to grow their own food.

Fired Up About Gas Stoves

Rep. Steve Toth, a Republican, filed the Home Range Defense Act as a “preemptive legislative strike” against any attempt by the Biden administration to stop Texans from cooking on gas stoves.

HB 1414 would declare Texas a sanctuary state for “seniors, chefs, hobbyist cooks, and parents, who rely on gas stove technology to prepare their meals,” Toth said in a written statement.

His proposal would prohibit state agencies from enforcing federal regulations against gas stoves, thus preserving them for use in the Lone Star State.

Toth believes President Joe Biden is fixated on turning everything electric, he told The Epoch Times. Biden promotes green energy, which proponents say is cleaner, to fuel electric cars and produce electricity for the nation's power grids.

The controversy over gas stoves flared after the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission



(Above) Chickens are one of the ‘least offensive’ animals people can raise to provide food for their families, Hall said.

(Left) A Texas lawmaker has filed a proposal that would prohibit state agencies from enforcing federal regulations against gas stoves.

suggested banning the gas appliances in January, claiming they are hazardous and pollute the air inside homes.

“We have a message for any D.C. insider trying to stop us from using gas stoves: ‘Come and Take ‘Em!’”

Homegrown Chicken Dinner

Texas lawmakers want to give city and suburban folks something to crow about when putting food on the table.

The chicken legislation would have similar provisions, allowing up to six chickens or fowl in the side or back yards of single-family residences.

Hall told The Epoch Times that chicken proposals similar to his SB 326 were filed in past legislative sessions, although support never took off.

But now, prices for eggs and chicken have soared since the bird flu wiped out some 52.7 million chickens. A string of fires at commercial chicken coops exacerbated the problem, killing tens of thousands more birds last year.

Chickens are one of the “least offensive” animals people can raise to provide food for their families, Hall said. The bills would mainly affect the suburbs and urban areas, where cities often regulate which animals can be kept in yards.

His SB 326 wouldn't overrule regulations that limit chickens in neighborhoods governed by homeowners associations—organizations that set rules for neighborhoods for details such as allowable roofing materials, fencing varieties, and animals.

This may be the year of the chicken as concerns about food security grow, Cain told The Epoch Times.

Cain's HB 1191 mirrors Hall's bill, which allows urban families to keep chickens—but gives cities the ability to regulate them, such as prohibiting roosters and requiring coops to be a certain distance from neighboring yards.

52.7 MILLION

chickens were wiped out due to the bird flu, increasing prices for eggs and chicken.

FROM TOP: BRANDON BELL/BETTY IMAGES; SCOTT OLSON/BETTY IMAGES

Chickens are one of the “least offensive” animals people can raise to provide food for their families, Hall said.

“We've been trying to do these things for a while to create the ability for people to be independent,” Cain said. “The timing seems to be better now.”

The proposals introduced by Landgraf and Cortez advocate for a broader range of food production by allowing up to six fowl and six rabbits, but no more than a total of eight animals. Those measures also would allow for fruit trees and gardens.

Under the bills, cities and counties could regulate such things as placement and type of materials used for coops, the size of coops, and the upkeep of gardens and fruit trees.

Cortez's HB 276 would allow energy production at a family residence, too. Families could install solar or wind-powered energy devices and rain-water harvesting systems.

Cost of Growing From Scratch

But consumers would need to weigh the cost of producing their own food, such as chickens.

At a website called Chicken Coop Design Plans, do-it-yourselfers can estimate start-up expenses, such as building a coop. They can also calculate the ongoing costs of providing feed and care.

Chickens can cost anywhere from \$3 to \$30 each, depending on the breed.

Young chicks cost as little as a few dollars each but require specialized equipment such as a heat lamp and brood box. Starting with babies can add \$100 to the cost.

It's easier to buy 4-week-old chicks that need less care, chicken experts suggest.

A Rhode Island red, a popular breed for backyard chicken enthusiasts, may cost about \$17 at four weeks of age.

Experienced chicken raisers advise that the least expensive way to get a coop is to build one from recycled materials or wood from a big-box hardware store.

Readymade chicken housing at farm supply stores can cost \$600 for a basic model. Luxurious digs designed to keep birds from flying the coop can go for \$4,000.

Chicken feed costs about \$15 per month per chicken. Bedding, such as wood shavings or shredded newspaper, can add \$10 per month to expenses.

Depending on the breed, some hens only lay eggs for three to four years. Four adults can produce a dozen eggs or more each week.

In Texas, it costs about \$4.50 to buy a dozen eggs. ■

ENERGY

WILL BOOST IN OIL, GAS EXPORT SLOWER ENERGY BILL S? *Critics say unleashing exports won't lower Americans' costs in global market*

BY JOHN HAUGHEY



*An 18-wheeler drives by oil pumpjacks
along a section of Highway 33 known
as the Petroleum Highway in Kern
County, Calif., on Sept. 28, 2022.*

PHOTO BY FREDERIC J. BROWN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

REPUBLICANS AND industry executives say Biden administration policies are preventing the nation's oil and gas producers from going full throttle and expanding exports, which they say will lower costs for consumers in the United States and make global energy supplies cleaner and more secure.

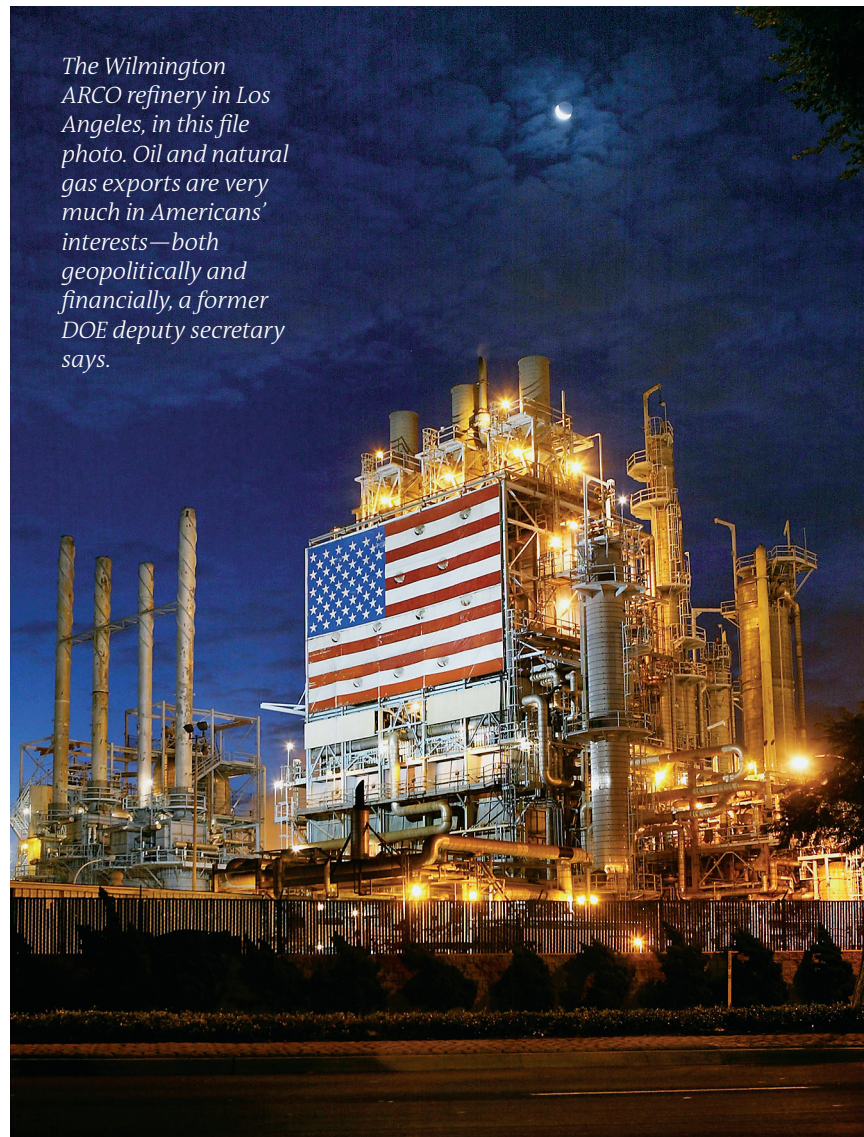
With Republicans regaining the House majority after the November 2022 midterm elections, GOP leadership is charting a 180-degree reversal in energy policy from the one carved by Democrats over the past four years that saw concerns about climate change, environmental protection, and renewable power pushed as “green energy” emphases.

House Republicans have introduced a 17-bill “Unleash America’s Energy” package that includes seven proposals that address oil and gas regulation and push for greater capacity to export them as a way to remedy “artificial” policy restrictions that have increased costs.

The bills “will increase American energy production, lower energy costs, strengthen domestic supply chains, and protect America’s energy grid. The various pieces of legislation being considered today will move the nation forward in our effort to enhance and strengthen American energy security,” Jeff Eshelman, president and CEO of the Independent Petroleum Association of America, told congressional lawmakers in a Feb. 7 hearing in Washington.

Democrats, some economists, and a range of consumer advocates argue that since domestically produced oil and natural gas are both globally traded commodities, world events dictate consumer prices—as they are doing now—and, therefore, proposals to “produce our way to lower costs” are poorly camouflaged attempts by an industry already enjoying record profits to degrade environmental regulations.

“Our record natural gas exports have radically upended domestic energy markets, forcing American families to compete with families in Berlin and Beijing for U.S.-produced energy,” Public Citizen Energy Program Director Tyson Slocum said during the Washington hearings, noting that with domestic oil and gas sold on global markets, the fuel prices Americans pay are now “directly



The Wilmington ARCO refinery in Los Angeles, in this file photo. Oil and natural gas exports are very much in Americans’ interests—both geopolitically and financially, a former DOE deputy secretary says.

influenced by global calamities.”

Among the proposals are measures that would mandate 30-day federal approval of “cross-border energy infrastructure,” aka pipelines; remove “public interest” when the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) weighs natural gas export proposals; repeal the federal Natural Gas Tax; prohibit the president from banning fracking; and require the National Petroleum Council to research U.S. refinery capacity and needs.

The two resolutions “express the sense” that there should be “no restrictions” on oil and gas exports and express “disapproval” of President Joe Biden’s revocation of the Keystone XL pipeline permit.

The 17 bills, which also include pro-

posed reforms of the Clean Air, Toxic Substances, Solid Waste, and Inflation Reduction acts, were vetted in Feb. 7–9 hearings before the House Natural Resources and Energy & Commerce committees in Washington and in Feb. 13–16 Texas field hearings. Some could be up for adoption on the House floor by late March.

Banning Export Bans

When fuel costs were soaring during 2021–2022 inflationary surges, Biden pondered actions the federal government could take in restraining runaway gasoline prices, such as releasing oil from the nation’s strategic reserve and reimposing the 1975–2016 ban on exporting domestically produced oil

and natural gas.

He was under pressure to do so. U.S. Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm in October 2021 said an oil export ban was a “possible tool,” and four senators—Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.), Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.), Jack Reed (D-R.I.), and Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.)—urged Biden in a July 2022 letter to reinstate an export ban on U.S. oil, claiming that it would “result in lower gasoline prices.”

Biden hasn’t adopted an export ban, nor has such a prospect been discussed recently, and the United States remains the world’s largest exporter of oil and natural gas.

But the president has said the oil and gas industry “won’t be needed” in 10 years, and congressional Republicans want to ensure he doesn’t artificially accelerate its demise. They’ve pushed legislation that entrenches exporting as a key component of the nation’s energy policy.

The 1975 Energy Policy & Conservation Act banned nearly all exports of U.S. crude oil and natural gas because import volumes were increasing while domestic production had flattened out.

The ban was designed to ensure U.S.-produced oil was priced at domestic cost and not on the global market, where prices were higher because OPEC and other producers were implementing production caps.

That all changed with the advent of hydraulic fracturing—fracking—and horizontal drilling in the early 2000s, game-changing technologies incubated in West Texas that ushered in the “shale revolution.”

In the period from 2009 to 2015, U.S. crude oil production doubled. In December 2015, Congress repealed the Energy Policy & Conservation Act export ban, allowing U.S. crude oil to be shipped overseas—60 percent now is—and loosening regulations on natural gas exports, which were also exploding.

According to the President’s Council of Economic Advisers, between 2007 and 2019, there was an eight-fold increase in extraction productivity for natural gas and a 19-fold increase in oil activity “resulting in the United States becoming the world’s largest oil and gas producer—a net exporter of oil and the largest exporter of gas.”

The United States is especially dominant in natural gas, with domestic producers accounting for 25 percent of daily global production—twice the combined output of its two largest rivals, Russia and Iran, up from 6 percent in 2015.

Bills Boosting Exports

Republicans and industry representatives argued across 10 hours of testimony before various committees in Washington and four hours of “field hearings” in Odessa and Midland, Texas, that higher production will keep prices steady even as demand increases. They want any talk of export bans preemptively ended and regulations on natural gas exports loosened.

“This legislation would remove all routine regulatory review to ensure that exports are not increasing prices for American families.”

*Tyson Slocum,
director, Public Citizen Energy Program*

The DOE regulates domestic natural gas exports, including LNG, under the 1938 Natural Gas Act. The 1992 National Energy Act amends the Natural Gas Act to allow exports to countries with which the United States has free trade agreements.

Exports to non-free trade agreement nations must be approved by the DOE

in a review process that requires the export to be in “the public interest.” More than 76 percent of current LNG exports are to nations the United States doesn’t have free trade agreements with and, therefore, must meet the “public interest” standard.

Republicans want to remove the “public interest” standard from the natural gas export pipeline by calling for the adoption of HR 647, the proposed “Unlocking our Domestic LNG Potential Act of 2023,” sponsored by Rep. Bill Johnson (R-Ohio).

Other bills that outline proposals to grease the glide path for increasing natural gas exports include the proposed “Promoting Interagency Coordination for Review of Natural Gas Pipelines Act,” sponsored by Rep. Michael Burgess (R-Texas), the “Promoting Cross-Border Energy Infrastructure Act,” and the unnumbered resolution “Expressing the sense of Congress that the Federal Government should not impose any restrictions on the export of crude oil or other petroleum products.”

Johnson, in both the Washington and West Texas hearings, said his bill “strengthens the United States international posture” so it “can lead the way in providing the world energy” that is produced under the planet’s most environmentally sensitive standards and is cleaner than natural gas produced elsewhere.

The bill also promises “to bring jobs and economic growth in places in ... Ohio, which sits atop the Utica-Marcellus [shale] shell,” he said.

Mark Menezes, a former DOE deputy secretary under the Trump admin- ❖



An oilfield worker fills his truck with water before heading to a drilling site in the Permian Basin oil field in Andrews, Texas, on Jan. 20, 2016.

istration, said during the Washington hearings that expanding U.S. natural gas exports “helps our friends and allies around the world by providing a steady source of clean natural gas to replace Russian gas and to help them meet their net-zero emission goals.”

Menezes said the bills remove “redundant reviews,” such as “public interest,” and the need for “multiple federal ‘permission slips’ to produce and liquefy LNG for export,” and it gives the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, not the DOE, the authority to approve natural gas export proposals.

He applauded removing the “anachronistic distinction” between nations with free trade agreements and those without. He said the United States will still be able to ensure that U.S. natural gas goes “only to our friends and allies as [Johnson’s bill] prohibits exports to any country that is an enemy of the U.S., is designated as a state sponsor of terrorism, or that is subject to sanctions, like Russia.”

Not in ‘Public Interest’

Public Citizen’s Slocum, whose national consumer advocacy organization represents more than 500,000 members, said during his testimony before the House Energy & Commerce Committee in Washington that the industry wants to remove “public interest” from the export review process because exporting domestic oil and natural gas isn’t in “the public interest.”

“Courts have long interpreted the intent of the ‘public interest’ determination ‘was to protect consumers against exploitation at the hands of natural gas companies,’” he said.

The purpose of the “public interest” review “was to promote a North American natural gas market that would benefit consumers—and not tolerate the use of a free trade agreement public interest determination to freely re-export to nations with whom no free trade agreement exists,” he said, noting that it’s doubtful the American people would think a bill that “endorses re-exports of U.S. produced gas from Mexico to China” would be in their “public interest.”

The “public interest” review has “been the standard for 85 years and we shouldn’t change it now,” Slocum said. “This legislation would remove



Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm (L) has urged President Joe Biden to reinstate an export ban on U.S. oil, claiming that it would “result in lower gasoline prices.”

all routine regulatory review to ensure that exports are not increasing prices for American families, and would allow unregulated exports to China” by allowing U.S. oil and natural gas exported to Mexico to be “re-exported” from Mexico to anywhere on the globe.

Oil and natural gas exports are very much in Americans’ interests—both geopolitically and financially, Menezes said.

“[An] American energy system is necessary for a reliable, affordable, and sustainable supply of energy for the U.S. and our neighboring countries,” he said, adding that the “cross-border infrastructure bills” outline needed clarifications in agreements among the United States, Mexico, and Canada.

The bills “will allow the three countries to be able to better withstand the global energy shocks of autocratic actions, like Putin’s invasion of Ukraine,” Menezes said. “Had the Keystone Pipeline not been canceled by President Biden, the U.S. and its allies would have had access to Canadian oil to lessen the import and use of Russian oil.”

Pipelines to China

Slocum said the bills seek to administratively grease the rails for domestic producers to expose more U.S. oil and gas to global market prices, increasing their profits while creating costly uncertainties for consumers—all while duping U.S.

taxpayers into subsidizing infrastructure improvements to increase their capacities to export.

For instance, he said, an expansive pipeline network already exists in delivering Permian Basin natural gas to processing and refining plants along the Texas Gulf Coast, including seven LNG terminals with the combined capacity to handle 14 billion cubic feet a day (Bcf/d) of natural gas and that are authorized by the DOE to export to non-free trade agreement countries.

They are Sabine Pass—where Cheniere Energy exported its first LNG cargo in March 2016—Cove Point, Elba Island, Cameron, Freeport, Calcasieu Pass, and Corpus Christi I and II. Three additional terminals authorized to export are under construction in Plaquemines, Corpus Christi III, and Golden Pass.

If completed as planned, the LNG terminals will increase exports just from the Permian Basin to 4.18 Bcf/d over the next two years, and increase the nation’s total natural gas exports to nearly 20 million Bcf/d by 2025.

There are an expanding number of similar terminals on Mexico’s Pacific coast that “serve Asian markets,” Slocum said. “Exports from Mexico’s Pacific Coast avoid the expense and time of scheduling travel through the Panama Canal faced by LNG export terminals located on the U.S. Gulf Coast.”



People ride horses near an oil pumpjack pulling oil from the Permian Basin oil field in Odessa, Texas, on March 13, 2022.

The bills being proposed by Republicans would essentially use pipelines to connect U.S. producers with terminals on Mexico’s Pacific coast all while avoiding the free trade agreement issue or any review at all, making Mexico the world’s fourth-largest exporter of natural gas despite not producing any domestically.

A key component for proponents of increasing exports is a 155-mile pipeline from the Permian Basin to several LNG terminals on the Texas coast and to the border, where it will be funneled to the eight terminals on Mexico’s Pacific Coast.

The proposed “Promoting Cross-Border Energy Infrastructure Act” would require pipeline proposals such as this to be approved by the federal government within 30 days.

“That is a de facto approval” of a pipeline that will send “U.S. natural gas to Mexico’s Pacific Coast and to China,” Slocum said, vowing that Public Citizen would challenge the proposal in court as against the “public interest” of U.S. consumers. “We are going to raise concerns about exporting Permian natural gas directly to China.”

More Is Less Costly—Or Not

Menezes and others who testified in the Washington and Texas hearings disagreed. The bills “both ensure domestic supply of natural gas for both domestic consumption and export and increase

access and delivery of supply to lower the costs of natural gas to homes and businesses and the cost of electricity to consumers,” he said.

Oil and natural gas exploration, excavation, refining, transmitting, and transporting are entangled in costly regulations that waste time and money without serving the “public interest” or domestic consumers, Menezes said.

The bills streamline and integrate federal agency actions and “establish reasonable timelines, and keep track of progress of the permitting and environmental reviews required under the National Environmental Policy Act and other laws” for the siting and construction of natural gas pipelines, he said.

“Not only is it imperative that all Americans have clean and reliable energy—Congress should prioritize efforts to reduce energy costs. Reducing costs

25%

THE UNITED STATES IS especially dominant in natural gas, with domestic producers accounting for 25 percent of daily global production—twice the combined output of its two largest rivals, Russia and Iran.

of government can save taxpayers’ dollars for use to offset the costs of energy,” Menezes said.

The measure that captures the mood of the House is the resolution “expressing the sense” of Congress that there should be no federal restrictions on the export of crude oil or other petroleum products.

“This is necessary because President Biden and Democrats on this committee have advocated for reinstating the crude oil export ban,” Rep. Jeff Duncan (R-S.C.) said in Washington. “Lifting the export ban in 2015 has lowered prices while also increasing our leverage globally—it would be shortsighted to reverse this.”

Rep. Diana DeGette (D-Colo.) said the bills dodge reality: Increasing exports won’t lower U.S. energy costs.

“They want to expand our and gas drilling and undermine bedrock environmental laws while not lowering costs for consumers, all to aid and abet an industry already reporting record profits,” she said.

Republicans are fostering confusion to make people think “that if we produce more oil and gas domestically, this is going to make us [energy] independent. That is simply not the case because it is an international market,” DeGette said.

She turned to Slocum sitting at the witness table during the Washington hearings and said: “Increases in oil and gas production would make us less energy dependent. Is that correct? It will make us less dependent?”

“No,” Slocum said. “That is not correct. Markets are globally priced.”

A week later in Texas, Republicans remained consistent and persistent: Increasing exports will lower domestic energy costs.

“Producing more American energy will reduce global emissions, increase energy reliability, and lower costs for American consumers,” Johnson said in Midland, deep in the heart of the Permian Basin.

“President Biden’s war on reliable energy, and the problems that war creates, is not limited to killing the use of oil, natural gas, and coal. His administration’s policies are blocking progress on the president’s own stated goals to develop resources for alternative energies such as wind, solar, and batteries.” ■

EDUCATION

New Frontier in Fighting Critical Race Theory

States reviewing AP African American Studies curriculum over concerns it's infused with CRT

By Terri Wu

FAIRFAX COUNTY, VA.— Newly released coursework for Advanced Placement (AP) African American Studies has become the new front in fighting critical race theory (CRT) in U.S. schools.

The focal point is whether the AP course—which allows high school students to earn college credits—is a vehicle for CRT, a Marxist framework that views issues through a racial lens and America as systemically racist.

The AP course drew national attention early in 2023 when Florida rejected the pilot version. In a Jan. 20 letter to the College Board, which is in charge of developing and approving AP courses, Florida Department of Education Commissioner Manny Diaz Jr. wrote, “As presented, the content of this course is inexplicably contrary to Florida law and significantly lacks educational value.”

In a tweet on the same day, Diaz listed Florida’s concerns about the AP draft curriculum, including “Black queer studies,” “Movements for Black Lives,” and authors associated with CRT. According to a law enacted last April, Florida bans teaching CRT in schools and workplace training programs. Although the ban was blocked in colleges and workplaces by a court injunction,

The first pilot of the AP course is offered in the current school year in 60 high schools nationwide.

it’s effective in K–12 schools.

Consequently, the College Board removed the names of many writers associated with CRT, “Black queer studies,” and “Black feminism” from the official curriculum released on Feb. 1. It drops “Movements for Black Lives” as a lesson focus, and now lists “Black conservatism” and Black Lives Matter as examples of project topics. To be used before the 2023–2024 school year, this pilot course is still banned in Florida.

In a statement issued on Feb. 11, the College Board denied changing the curriculum because of Florida’s rejection and revealed that the January letter was the second rejection letter from Florida; the first was received last September.

“Like all new AP courses, AP African American Studies is undergoing a rigorous, multi-year pilot phase, collecting feedback from teachers, students, scholars, and policymakers,” Jerome White, director of communications for the College Board, previously told The Epoch Times in an emailed statement.

The first pilot of the AP course is offered in the current school year in 60 high schools nationwide. The first AP African American Studies exam will be available in the spring of 2024. First announced in August 2022, the draft coursework was reported in the media last September.

More States Take Stance

Following Florida’s lead, four Republican-led states—Arkansas, North Dakota, Mississippi, and Virginia—said their education departments would review the course framework accord-



After Florida rejected a pilot course on the basis that it taught critical race theory and other topics of concern under state law, the College Board removed the names of many writers associated with CRT, “Black queer studies,” and “Black feminism” from the official curriculum.

OCTAVIO JONES/BETTY IMAGES

ing to state laws. Gov. Glenn Youngkin of Virginia and Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders of Arkansas issued executive orders banning CRT in K–12 schools on their first days in office.

A state Republican representative in Texas introduced a bill on Feb. 3 that would require all AP courses to comply with state laws and would go into effect on Sept. 1 if enacted.

Meanwhile, two Democrat-led states—Illinois and New Jersey—emphasized the need for the AP course. In a Jan. 26 tweet, Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker said, “We reject any change to AP African American Studies in order to appease extremists like the Florida Governor and his Republican allies.” Then on Feb. 14, New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy announced the expansion of the AP course offering from one school

in his state this school year to 26 in the next.

Heated Topic in Virginia

On Feb. 22, four school board members in Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS)—Virginia’s largest school district, with over 180,000 students—wrote a letter to Youngkin and Virginia Education Secretary Aimee Guidera calling for “prompt approval” of the AP African American Studies course. “As elected school board members who believe diversity is one of Virginia’s greatest strengths, we urge you not to impede the teaching of AP African-American Studies,” they wrote.

In an emailed statement, Youngkin’s spokesman Macaulay Porter told The Epoch Times, “After numerous reports about draft course content, the gover-

Florida, Arkansas, North Dakota, Mississippi, and Virginia said their education departments would review the course framework according to state laws.

nor asked the Education Secretariat to review the College Board’s proposed AP African American Studies course as it pertains to Executive Order 1.”

Guidera also responded to the FCPS school board members in a statement that the AP African American Studies course review was a regular action to “ensure that our students are being taught how to think, and not what to think.”

“The letter from a subset of the Fairfax County School Board is confusing, given that this review is a standard procedure to ensure the course aligns to our academic standards and teaches all history,” she said. “Our hope is that the College Board’s revisions to the pilot have addressed national concerns around the African American Studies pilot so that we can offer a college-level, rigorous course in Virginia’s schools. Neither Governor Youngkin nor I will apologize for having high expectations and taking the time to ensure that our course offerings prepare every Virginia student for success in life.”

AP course selections vary by state. For example, in Virginia, the selection of AP courses is decided by local school divisions.

FCPS told The Epoch Times that eight high schools in its division were set to offer the pilot AP course in the 2023–2024 school year. “[The] running of the course at each school will depend on student enrollment,” a spokesman wrote in an email. ■

AIRLINES

AVIATION SAFETY TEETERING, PILOTS SAY

COVID-19
mandates,
diversity
emphasis are
key issues as
safety summit
approaches

BY JANICE HISLE

*An airplane takes off from
Hollywood Burbank Airport
following a powerful winter
storm in Burbank, Calif.,
on Feb. 26.*

PHOTO BY MARIO TAMA/GETTY IMAGES

AMERICAN AVIATION SAFETY seems to be teetering on “a knife’s edge,” as one veteran airline pilot put it. Usually an unflappable bunch, a half-dozen pilots told The Epoch Times that they’re increasingly troubled over the state of aviation.

Although 14 years have passed since the last fatal U.S. commercial airliner accident, pilots point to a cluster of near-misses. Those are particularly disturbing considering the chaotic climate in which they occurred.

As the COVID-19 pandemic retreated and travel ramped up, embarrassing computer failures wreaked havoc with flight schedules. At the same time, the industry continues to suffer from the ripple effects of federal COVID-shot mandates and other government policy changes.

A female pilot said well-trained, quick-thinking pilots have repeatedly staved off disasters.

“We are at the precipice,” she said. “If we make the wrong choice—if we continue to allow technology to degrade and lack of experience to fill these seats—we’re looking at a safety disaster.”

She and several other airline pilots granted interviews on the condition of anonymity to protect their jobs. Five male pilots agree with the female pilot’s assessment. One of them is Brett Vance, a former Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) test pilot who has also flown for the U.S. military and a major commercial airline.

“Until recently, we have had the finest National Airspace safety system in the entire world,” Vance said. “All of a sudden ... since the rollout of the COVID shot, some things have started to go downhill significantly.”

Citing “recent events,” the FAA announced on Feb. 14 that it would convene a safety summit in March to preserve the nation’s air-travel safety record. Vance thinks this step should have been taken sooner.

The effectiveness of the FAA’s effort will hinge mainly on two things, Vance and other pilots say: who’s picked to serve on the panel and whether any topics will be off limits.



Brett Vance, a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Test Pilot School, poses with a Viper aircraft at Edwards Air Force Base in July 1991.

“You don’t want pilots that are incapacitated because of their vaccine status—and you lose an airplane.”

Anonymous pilot

COVID Caused Many Issues

For the interviewed pilots, COVID-related questions are of primary concern; some worry that the FAA might shut down much-needed discussion of those issues because they’re politically charged.

The Biden administration’s 2021 COVID-19 vaccine mandate for federal contractors applied to many airline employees. Balking at the mandate, scores of older experienced air traffic controllers opted to retire. Vance was among those who quit after facing a “job-or-job” ultimatum.

After recovering from the COVID-induced air travel slump, airlines have gone on a hiring binge, according to Airlines for America, an advocacy group.

“Every day, more than 750,000 workers in America make our industry go,” the group stated in a TV commercial that aired during the Super Bowl. “Last year alone, airlines helped 50,000 new careers take flight. ... And we’re still hiring.”

The world’s largest pilots union, the Air Line Pilots Association International (ALPA), says there’s no shortage of pilots, challenging others’ repeated assertions.

ALPA reported in August 2022 that nearly 9,000 new pilots were certified in a year.

“The union’s seven largest passenger carriers have more pilots and conduct less flying than they did before the pandemic,” the report reads.

Pilots say there’s a downside to that glut of new hires: They’ll likely lack the on-the-job experience to help them figure out how to respond in a crisis.

Vaccine Worries Lurk

Pilots said many veteran aviation employees are dealing with health problems that may be effects of the virus itself or the COVID-19 vaccines.

However, the FAA recently told Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.) that it knew of only four possible vaccine-injured pilots who were “active.”

That response prompted Johnson to accuse the FAA of “turning a blind eye” to possible vaccine-induced health problems among pilots.

Naming five pilots with suspected vaccine-related issues, Johnson asked the FAA what steps it had taken to investigate. The agency listed no specific actions in its Feb. 10 response to Johnson.

Instead, the FAA wrote that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention oversees “tracking and follow-up of suspected vaccine adverse events.”

But in the aftermath of COVID-19 vaccines or illnesses, both known to cause lingering effects, Vance and others think the risk of a pilot dying suddenly is now elevated.

FAA Change Stirs Debate

That’s especially problematic, some say, in light of a recent FAA health-standard

change that could allow pilots’ heart issues to slip past.

Late last year, the agency broadened the acceptable range of an electrocardiogram reading for pilots during their required physical exams. Thus, pilots who would have been flagged for additional heart tests can now be cleared to fly, as The Epoch Times reported recently.

“You don’t want pilots that are incapacitated because of their vaccine status—and you lose an airplane,” said an ex-military pilot who now works for a commercial airline. “But that’s the elephant in the room that nobody’s talking about.”

The FAA initially gave no justification for widening the “PR interval” on pilots’ EKGs, which measures how long it takes for an electrical impulse to travel from one part of the heart to another.

When questioned in January about the revised EKG standard, the FAA issued only a general statement, saying it “follows standard processes based on data and science” when changing medical requirements and guidance.

In an email to The Epoch Times, the agency also stated, “The FAA’s Federal Air Surgeon determined that pilots and air traffic controllers can safely receive the Pfizer, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson, or Novavax vaccine.”

Vaccine Testing Questioned

Many people in aviation question why the FAA gave the green light to pilot vaccinations in the first place; they doubt that studies on the vaccines were explicitly done in aviation settings. Pilots’ bodies undergo extraordinary stresses. Those include changes in altitude, air pressure, and oxygen, along with bursts of intense tasks.

“So, the issue is if this person has a cardiac event, you know, on what we call a high gain task, such as takeoff, which is a really, really busy period,” Vance said.

He said a surge of adrenaline or other factors could cause undetected COVID-19-related heart damage to trigger an abnormal heartbeat.

“That’s when the ‘died suddenly’ incident can happen—just like that,” Vance said.

Asked about such concerns, the FAA has responded that it “has no evidence of aircraft accidents or incapacitations caused by pilots suffering medical complications associated with COVID-19 vaccines.”

Critics allege that the FAA lacks such evidence because the agency has refused to look for it. Vance and other pilots can rattle off examples of pilots with suspected vaccine-re-

FROM L: COURTESY U.S. AIR FORCE 412TH TEST WING PUBLIC AFFAIRS; FREDERIC J. BROWN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



A pop-up clinic offering COVID-19 vaccinations and booster shots at Los Angeles International Airport on Dec. 22, 2021. The Biden administration’s 2021 COVID-19 vaccine mandate for federal contractors applied to many airline employees.

lated issues; some are on the list of five pilots that Johnson asked the FAA to address.

If a pilot were to have a vaccine-related health emergency, causing an accident, investigators would likely dismiss the cause as “just had a stroke or a heart attack, and it couldn’t possibly be related to the vaccines,” one pilot said.

He then suggested a grim reality: Any evidence of a vaccine-related cause would be concealed if bodies are destroyed in wreckage.

dustry concur. They’ve been trying to sound the alarm for months. As The Epoch Times reported in August 2022, pilots and flight attendants say corporate initiatives and government policies give preferential treatment to people with “minority” ethnic, racial, gender identity, and sexual orientation traits.

“They’re trying to shove them through the system. ... The quality is just not there like we used to have,” one pilot said.

Pilots and flight attendants say corporate initiatives and government policies give preferential treatment to people with “minority” ethnic, racial, gender identity, and sexual orientation traits.

Computer, Organizational Woes

Even before COVID-19 hit, the airline industry was grappling with issues that came to a head only in recent months.

Southwest Airlines has acknowledged that organizational problems and an outdated computer system contributed to its infamous December 2022 meltdown, which resulted in more than 16,000 flights canceled and affected millions of people in the wake of a winter storm.

In January, the FAA admitted that its decades-old Notice to Air Missions (NOTAM) computer failed after a contractor made a mistake, causing all U.S. air travel to be shut down for two hours on Jan. 11. About 11,000 flights were affected.

At a U.S. Senate hearing that examined the NOTAM failure, several senators claimed that the FAA has been overly absorbed with promoting workforce “diversity and inclusion.” The senators alleged that this is an obsession and that it has distracted the FAA from essential tasks such as updating its computer systems.

Pilots who work in the airline in-

As a result, pilots say they now more frequently ask air traffic controllers to repeat themselves—because of poor pronunciation, their communications can’t be understood.

Vance is concerned about such reports. “When a pilot will go out of his or her way to say that, something bad is happening,” Vance said, “because, usually, we don’t even think about that kind of stuff.”

He wonders how many thousands of fellow pilots are experiencing these difficulties.

“We’re just a ticking time bomb, in my opinion,” Vance said, mainly because of the air traffic control snafus and the increased likelihood of pilots suffering a sudden cardiac event during takeoffs or landings.

“If we have one accident caused by any of this, I think our National Airspace System may grind to a halt.”

Any such stoppage could linger much longer than the two-day civilian air travel pause after the World Trade Center terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

The impact of a prolonged shutdown would be huge, Vance said, considering that much of the U.S. economy depends



Brett Vance with an Embraer Legacy 500 business jet, during his time as a Federal Aviation Administration test pilot, in Brazil in 2015.

on air travel to get people and goods from one place to another.

“And there goes your country,” he said.

Distracted by Ideology

Pilots and flight attendants complain that they’re forced to undergo corporate “diversity, equity, and inclusion” training. Lessons may include the importance of using preferred pronouns for a transgender person or avoiding gender-related words such as “airmen.”

Such issues are irrelevant to operating a flight safely and efficiently, according to one pilot.

“We’ve lost our focus from what’s im-

portant,” the pilot said.

Another pilot points out that airline safety improvements are often “written in blood” after people lose their lives.

After Colgan Air Flight 3407 crashed near Buffalo, New York, in 2009, multiple new regulations were enacted. Those included a rule requiring 1,500 hours of flight time, rather than just 250 hours, for anyone to qualify as a co-pilot on a commercial airliner.

But there’s debate over whether that rule enhanced safety because, as Forbes magazine reported last year, “people spend years getting flight experience in areas not necessarily

associated with flying commercial aircraft in a complex system, and end up entering that system unprepared.”

Some airlines now allow a newly minted pilot to “hold a captain’s seat inside of one year,” according to one pilot.

“He’ll hit the line with less than a year’s experience and be flying alongside brand-new pilots,” the pilot said. “That’s the scary scenario.”

Several pilots remain hopeful that the FAA can take meaningful steps to avoid a potential disaster.

3 ‘Close Calls’

Actions of pilots and air traffic controllers are under scrutiny in a trio of

recent near misses that have drawn attention from Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) and other lawmakers.

An aviation publication, The Air Current, detailed several such “close calls.”

On Dec. 18, 2022, a United Airlines flight took a steep dive, coming within 800 feet of the Pacific Ocean shortly after takeoff in stormy weather at Kahului Airport in Maui, Hawaii.

On Jan. 13, jets from Delta and American airlines came within 1,400 feet of colliding on the runway at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York.

And on Feb. 4, there was an even scarier incident in Cruz’s home state of Texas. A FedEx cargo plane had been cleared to land at Austin-Bergstrom International Airport. Visibility was poor. The FedEx plane descended within 100 feet of a Southwest Airlines plane rolling along that same runway.

“If you were sitting on that Southwest flight, and you knew how close you came to having a plane landed on top of you, killing every person on that plane, you would understandably be horrified,” Cruz said during a Feb. 15 Senate hearing focused on FAA operations.

He asked Acting FAA Administrator Billy Nolen: “How can this happen? How did air traffic control direct one plane onto the runway to take off and another plane to land and have them both within 100 feet of each other? And what can we do to make sure that doesn’t happen again?”

Runway incursions, the “incorrect presence of an aircraft, vehicle or person” in a takeoff or landing area, are frequent.

According to the FAA, there were 1,732 runway incursions at U.S. airports in 2022.

Nolen told Cruz: “When we think about the controls, how we train both our controllers and our pilots, the system works” as intended; swift action averted “a horrific outcome.” ■

EXCLUSIVE

ANTI- MANDATE HOLLYWOOD SPEAKS UP

Blocked from roles and locked out of unions, celebrities are battling against vaccine mandates

BY ALICE GIORDANO



Actor Woody Harrelson arrives at the Regency Village Theatre in Los Angeles on Oct. 10, 2019.

PHOTO BY APU GOMES/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

ALARGE GROUP OF Hollywood actors says they have been locked out of their union buildings and blocked from competing for roles because they decided against taking the COVID-19 shot.

In exclusive interviews with The Epoch Times, the celebrities said they have sent more than 800 “unanswered” emails to their union, SAG-AFTRA (Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists), about its continued enforcement of what they call an unconstitutional mandate that violates their right to informed consent and protection against what they characterize as medical experimentation with overwhelming proof of potentially dangerous health risks.

Emails, memos, and other correspondence shared with The Epoch Times show that COVID-19 vaccine mandates are in fact as much a battleground issue in Hollywood as it has been for military and health care workers.

Like others, actors told The Epoch Times that their requests for religious exemptions from the vaccines have been ignored, despite that a “return to work agreement” established by SAG-AFTRA explicitly says producers must consider them.

According to a SAG-AFTRA memo, 1 in 4 productions have mandated the vaccine for so-called Zone A workers, which includes on-set performers.

“No business that I know of, including our own government, requires testing before you enter a building, including hospitals,” “Summer of ’70” director Ed Rollin wrote in a recent email to SAG-AFTRA President Fran Drescher, best known for her role in the 1990s TV hit “The Nanny.”

SAG-AFTRA President Fran Drescher speaks onstage during the 29th Annual Screen Actors Guild Awards at Fairmont Century Plaza in Los Angeles, Calif., on Feb. 26, 2023. (Kevin Winter/Getty Images)

Some actors also shared stories of the health problems they developed after caving to the expectation that they get the COVID-19 vaccine, such as Hollywood stuntwoman and actress Michelle Jubilee Gonzales, who told The Epoch Times that she believes she developed



A woman walks past the closed El Capitan Theater during the pandemic, on Hollywood Boulevard in Los Angeles on June 12, 2020.

both reproductive and cardiac-related health problems immediately after getting an injection.

“SAG-AFTRA is no longer running like a member-run union but rather a tyranny with Duncan Crabtree-Ireland at the helm,” said Gonzales, whose credits include the TV series “Stargate Origins” and stunts in the 2022 Marvel blockbuster “Black Panther: Wakanda Forever.”

“It is criminal what is happening under his usurped leadership.”

Crabtree-Ireland, the executive director of SAG-AFTRA, didn’t respond to requests for comment.

Pushback Escalates

The controversy heated up three weeks ago when SAG-AFTRA, along with the Alliance of Motion Picture & Television

Producers, decided to extend COVID-19 vaccine mandates and other protocols for members.

Last week, the group of actors called for a debate on the issue with their own medical experts pitted against a retired pediatrician that SAG-AFTRA contracts with to establish their pro-vaccine mandate policy. Union executives, including Drescher, declined.

The debate continued into last weekend, with actor Woody Harrelson sending shock waves throughout national media and sparking a frenzy of social media posts over his unscripted monologue mocking COVID-19 vaccine mandates on “Saturday Night Live” on Feb. 25.

In talking about a fictional script he pretended to have rejected, Harrelson said: “The movie goes like this: The biggest

FROM L: MARK RALSTON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES; DIA DIPSAPULI/GETTY IMAGES

drug cartels in the world get together and buy up all the media and all the politicians, and force all the people in the world to stay locked in their homes—and people only can come out if they take the cartels’ drugs and keep taking them over and over.

“I threw the script away—I mean, who’s going to believe that crazy idea?”

Last weekend, actors against the vaccine mandate organized a protest of the Feb. 26 annual SAG Awards ceremony, at the swanky Fairmont Copley Plaza in Los Angeles. A party hosted by People Magazine is planned—which drew charges of hypocrisy from the actors since it listed no vaccine requirements.

What Hollywood’s Anti-Mandate Actors Are Saying

The day before the awards, actress Maya Dunbar of “The Mentalist” told The Epoch Times that refusing the COVID-19

injection has become like the “scarlet letter” in Hollywood.

“Thousands of us [have] been gaslit, demeaned, and kept out of meetings,” she said, adding that early in the pandemic, she could understand the criticism of vaccine skeptics, but not now with all of the negative evidence regarding the safety of the vaccines.

“It has honestly been the most horrific experience our family has ever gone through.”

She and her husband, Rockmond Dunbar, have four children, whom they homeschool. They left California over that state’s COVID-19 vaccine mandates.

Last year, Rockmond Dunbar filed a federal civil rights lawsuit against Disney after being fired from the set of Fox’s popular TV show “9-1-1” for refusing the jab.

Disney also rejected Rockmond Dunbar’s medical and religious requests for exemption from the experimental injections.

The veteran actor, who’s been in major shows for the past 30 years, has not been able to land any roles since, and has been shunned and subject to hateful criticism, Maya Dunbar said, in the very industry that claims to embrace diversity.

“This is a Godless industry,” she said, pointing to Hollywood’s heavy reliance on Big Pharma advertising, which she sees as the true reason why, as she put it, “a blind pharmaceutical kind of frenzy cult” has been created in Hollywood.

“You have a lot of people who just don’t want to lose what they have—their worldly treasures, and if that means having to shill some shots or some pills or whatever [it] is, that’s what it means.”

She emphasized that her husband’s lawsuit was filed under the religious beliefs they hold as members of the Church of Universal Wisdom, which forbids vaccines.

Other actors have also filed lawsuits after being refused roles or barred from sets, while others told The Epoch Times they are planning to do the same. The discrimination against their medical choices is becoming a growing legal battle that belies the hyperbole that Hollywood is a bedlam filled with pro-mandate “liberals.”

In contradicting more Hollywood stigmatism, several actors point to the fact that the industry embraces the

pro-abortion “My body, my choice” slogan, but abandons the edict over COVID-19 vaccination.

The contradiction was first raised at SAG-AFTRA’s national convention by actor and Hollywood voiceover artist Erik Nicolaisen, who became a household face in 2013 when he starred in a popular but controversial Super Bowl commercial for Volkswagen, in which he portrayed a white man who spoke Jamaican.

“They squelched any discussion of it,” Nicolaisen, who served as a union delegate at the time, told The Epoch Times. “That’s how they dealt with the contradiction.”

Who’s Responsible?

Nicolaisen joins several actors who place especially heavy blame on Drescher, the union’s president, for not supporting actors opposed to COVID-19 vaccine

“Thousands of us [have] been gaslit, demeaned, and kept out of meetings.”

Maya Dunbar, actress, “The Mentalist”



Actors Maya Gilbert and Rockmond Dunbar attend the 2018 Fox Network Upfront in New York on May 14, 2018.



The “Actor” statue on display during the annual Screen Actors Guild Awards in Los Angeles on Jan. 30, 2016. SAG–AFTRA has decided to extend COVID-19 vaccine mandates and other protocols for members.

mandates, as well as for not putting more pressure on the union as well as productions to allow personal choice. Drescher reportedly experienced her own adverse reaction to a COVID-19 vaccine.

Boston-based actor Chuck Slavin, who serves on SAG’s New England board, is also critical of Drescher for not objecting strongly enough to the union’s mandate.

He and other actors have called the vaccine mandates “Nazi-like protocols” akin to directing unvaccinated actors to wear armbands.

“On this issue, she is acting more like a Hollywood actress than a union president,” Slavin told *The Epoch Times*. Slavin’s credits include “Boston’s Finest” and “Annabelle Hooper.”

Drescher didn’t respond to requests for comment.

In a Feb. 9 interview with *Variety* magazine, Drescher indicated that she supports measures to prevent the spread of disease on sets and that increasingly fewer productions are mandating the shot—a trend she expects to continue.

“I have been outspoken about my position on this, but I’m really only one person,” she said. “It’s not a dictatorship. And I have kept the conversation alive.”

In a recent exchange of emails that contained occasionally fiery debates—with some between Drescher, Slavin, and other actors—Drescher pointed out

Actors have called the vaccine mandates ‘Nazi-like protocols’ akin to directing unvaccinated actors to wear armbands.

to Slavin that the extension of the vaccine mandate was based on a survey of actors that showed the majority of them supported keeping the order in place.

Drescher conceded that many surveys turned in by actors were omitted from the results because they were submitted anonymously, asserting that they could have been completed by “someone’s grandmother for all we knew.”

But as some actors—like major Hollywood stuntman Peter Antico, who works with big names such as Sylvester Stallone—pointed out, the survey grossly underrepresents union members’ views, counting just 7,696 responses, representing around 5 percent of SAG–AFTRA’s 160,000 members.

The results, which were shared with

The Epoch Times, show that 67.1 percent wanted the mandate to stay in place, 26.1 percent didn’t, and about 6.8 percent didn’t respond to the question.

“Do it for grandma’ was a lie,” Antico said. “These are now irrefutable facts. Crabtree-Ireland and President Drescher have refused an open debate on these facts, nor have they demonstrated common sense. And as a result, they have irrevocably harmed thousands of members.”

Actors Say Industry Violating Constitutional Rights

Drescher has also encouraged those not wanting to take the vaccine to apply for an exemption.

The problem with her position, several actors told *The Epoch Times*, is that none of their exemptions have even been considered, let alone granted.

Antico, Slavin, Dunbar, Nicolaisen, and Gonzales—along with some high-name recognition actors who asked to remain anonymous—heavily emphasized that SAG–AFTRA is violating their Title VII rights, which require employers to accommodate employees’ religious beliefs.

It’s the same argument under which health care workers have won lawsuits against hospitals that have denied them exemptions from the experimental vaccine.

In a recent exchange of emails with a SAG–AFTRA lawyer, “La Cible” and “Eleanor” actress Imoya Monroque asked the attorney to send her copies of the “so-called reports” that back the union’s mandate policy.

“Do you live in a vacuum or a bubble?” Monroque asked in a Feb. 21 email, detailing evidence that the vaccines are not only ineffective at preventing transmission and infection, but also dangerous.

The basis of her ire was the union’s decision to bar her and a group of actors from using the members’ lounge for a meeting at its New York location without proof of vaccination.

Union attorney Jason Touretz told Monroque by email that the decision was “due to the unreasonable risk” they would pose to other members.

Maya Dunbar said the argument is hypocritical at best, with SAG–AFTRA hosting unvetted COVID-19 parties in the same buildings where they had



The Hollywood sign in Los Angeles on May 24, 2020. Actress Maya Dunbar said that refusing the COVID-19 injection has become like the “scarlet letter” in Hollywood.

exiled unvaccinated union members who “pay the same dues” to support the facilities and union like the vaccinated actors they are supporting. She also pointed to all the industry events they attend, as well as other high-profile events like sports games including the recent Super Bowl.

“The reality is, they know they have done so many members wrong and they don’t want to have to deal with us, face us because they don’t want to be accountable,” she said. “We’ve been completely shut out and shut up.”

A recent memo circulated by Crabtree-Ireland to union members outraged anti-mandate actors.

“We recognize that some of our members face challenges in securing employment if they are unable to or choose not to be vaccinated, but we also acknowledge the many members who would be unable to work or who would choose not to work in an unvaccinated workplace due to the additional risk involved,” stated Crabtree-Ireland, who was first hired in 2021 as SAG–AFTRA’s top executive.

Slavin said when he and other actors contacted Crabtree-Ireland about the comment, the executive director basically replied with the attitude that there are “two kinds of actors—those who are vaccinated and can work, and those who are unvaccinated and cannot work.”

‘I Only Did It to Keep My Job’

Union actor Lynne Marie Merzejewski, who made appearances on “Desperate Housewives” and “CSI: New York,” told *The Epoch Times* that she was so opposed to the vaccine that she was “literally crying in the corner of CVS” trying to muster the strength to do what she said she knew was wrong.

“I had worked so long to get where I was. I only did it to keep my job,” she said.

Unfortunately, Merzejewski’s fears proved true and she developed several medical conditions right after taking the shot, including peripheral neuropathy in one of her legs, that she had never experienced before.

She said she went to a neurologist, who told her the symptom was a common

side effect of COVID-19 vaccines; however, the doctor didn’t want to get involved in reporting her case to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System. More commonly known as VAERS, it’s the government’s self-reporting database of potential vaccine injuries intended to track the safety risks from vaccines.

“Nobody in Hollywood wants to admit that these things are happening,” Merzejewski said, who can no longer work in the business because of her injury.

Other actors who have also taken action against SAG–AFTRA’s vaccine mandate include Ingo Rademacher, who was a star of the daytime soap opera “General Hospital.” Rademacher has filed a lawsuit against ABC over his firing for refusing to get a COVID-19 injection.

Other big-name actors who have risked upsetting Hollywood producers by coming forward to talk about the issue include Ice Cube, who in November 2022 told *Entertainment Weekly* that he lost a \$9 million contract for a role in the movie “Oh Hello No” for refusing to the vaccines. ■

Toxic chemicals from the Norfolk Southern Railway train derailment float in Leslie Run creek in East Palestine, Ohio, on Feb. 25.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL SWENSEN/GETTY IMAGES

TIMELINE

TRAIN DERAILMENT, TOXIC CHEMICAL SPILL IN OHIO

A timeline of the derailment, the chemical burnoff, and the aftermath

BY JEFF LOUDERBACK

EAST PALESTINE WAS LIKE MOST SMALL communities in the United States—the kind of place where families have lived for generations, everyone seems to know each other, and high school football Friday nights are like holidays.

That comfort and nostalgia abruptly changed on Feb. 3, when a Norfolk Southern Railway freight train carrying 151 cars derailed in this village of 4,761 in eastern Ohio near the Pennsylvania border.

The train was en route to Conway,

Pennsylvania, from Madison, Illinois, and it traveled through heavily populated areas such as Cleveland before derailing in East Palestine.

For weeks now, East Palestine and surrounding communities have been coping with the aftermath, including the release of thousands of gallons of toxic chemicals, as local, state, and federal officials try to determine both short- and long-term courses of action.

Here is a timeline of the train derailment and its aftermath:

Feb. 3

- A Norfolk Southern train carrying 151 cars derailed in East Palestine at about 9 p.m.
- Fifty cars derail, and 11 cars containing hazardous chemicals catch fire.



Smoke rises from the derailed cargo train in East Palestine, Ohio, on Feb. 4.

Feb. 4

- East Palestine Mayor Trent Conaway declares a state of emergency, citing a “train derailment with hazardous materials.”
- Residents of East Palestine and surrounding communities are told to evacuate the area.
- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) says that contaminated runoff from the derailment has been discovered in two local creeks: Sulphur Run and Leslie Run.
- Norfolk Southern contractors install booms and underflow dams to restrict the flow of contaminated water.



An environmental company removes dead fish downstream from the site of the train derailment.

Feb. 5

- Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine is notified that one car carrying vinyl chloride is at risk of exploding. Officials are faced with “two bad options”: allowing the car to explode—which could launch deadly shrapnel nearly a mile—or vent and burn the chemical.
- Vinyl chloride is a chemical used to make PVC ❖



Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine urged residents within a mile of the train derailment site to evacuate.

FROM TOP: DUSTIN FRANZ/AP IMAGES; ALAN FRED/REUTERS; DREW ANBERG/GETTY IMAGES

pipes and other products. The National Cancer Institute notes that vinyl chloride has been linked to cancers of the brain, lungs, blood, lymphatic system, and liver.

- DeWine issues an “urgent evacuation notice” to anyone who hasn’t yet evacuated within a mile of the train derailment, saying, “This is a matter of life and death.”



A view from a drone of the freight train in flames.

Feb. 6

- Norfolk Southern and state and local officials decide to release and burn vinyl chloride from five rail cars.
- Norfolk Southern conducts the burn of vinyl chloride at about 4:15 p.m., sending flames and thick black smoke billowing.

Feb. 7

- DeWine says it isn’t clear when residents will be allowed to return to their homes.

Feb. 8

- DeWine holds a press conference at East Palestine High School with Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro, East Palestine Fire Chief Keith Drabick, and other officials from Ohio and Pennsylvania.
- DeWine announces that the evacuation order has been lifted and that residents can return to their homes.
- Norfolk Southern trains resume their routes through East Palestine.

Feb. 10

- The EPA sends a general notice of potential liability to Norfolk Southern, detailing areas in which the company may be liable for damages and cleanup related to the derailment. The letter names other

hazardous chemicals found at the derailment site following the release and burn of vinyl chloride, including ethylene glycol monobutyl ether, ethylhexyl acrylate, isobutylene, and butyl acrylate.

Feb. 13

- Norfolk Southern submits its remedial action plan to the EPA, explaining its response to the derailment thus far and recommending additional actions. The plan explains that pooled liquids are being collected into a vacuum truck and prepared for disposal. Surface water flow is rerouted from the derailment site, and underflow dams are in place.
- Air quality monitoring is underway. Well water is being sampled. Soil and surface water sampling is planned. Shallow soil will be removed “to reduce direct contact risk,” the plan says, and soil sampling is scheduled to happen in “the next several days.”
- The railroad says it’s preparing to install groundwater monitoring wells to “evaluate the nature and extent of groundwater impacts associated with the derailment.”

Feb. 14

- DeWine holds a press briefing and reports that Norfolk Southern has agreed to pay for the cost of clean-up and damages in East Palestine and that workers from the railroad will remain in the village until the situation is resolved.
- Shapiro publishes an open letter to Norfolk Southern CEO Alan Shaw announcing that Norfolk Southern’s conduct is under investigation by the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission.
- The National Transportation Safety Board reports that investigators identified the exact car that initiated the crash. A video shows “what appears to be a wheel bearing in the final stage of overheat failure moments before the derailment,” the board said.

Feb. 15

- DeWine issues a statement saying that East Palestine residents can safely drink the municipal water, according to the Ohio EPA. Results returned to the Ohio EPA show no contaminants in raw water from the five wells that feed into East Palestine’s municipal water system, DeWine’s office says.
- People who get their drink-

ing water from private wells should first get their water tested, as their wells may be closer to the surface than municipal water wells, the Ohio EPA says.

Feb. 16

- Residents of East Palestine and surrounding communities pack into the high school gymnasium for a town hall meeting with Mayor Conaway, Ohio Department of Health Director Dr. Bruce Vanderhoff, U.S. Rep. Bill Johnson (R-Ohio), and representatives from the EPA, Ohio EPA, and the Ohio Division of Natural Resources.
- Norfolk Southern had originally planned to send officials to the town hall, but the company issues a statement hours beforehand: “We know that many are rightfully angry and frustrated right now. Unfortunately, after consulting with community leaders, we have become increasingly concerned about the growing physical threat to our employees and members of the community around this event stemming from the increasing likelihood of the participation of outside parties. With that in mind, Norfolk Southern



Members of the community gather to discuss their safety and other environmental concerns at a town hall on Feb. 15.

Local waterways are monitored following the train derailment, which caused chemical spills and smoke near the derailment site.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY; ALAN FREED/REUTERS



will not be in attendance this evening.”

- A Norfolk Southern train derails in Michigan. None of the damaged cars contain hazardous materials, and no injuries are reported.

- Norfolk Southern CEO Shaw sends an open letter to East Palestine residents pledging that the railroad would not abandon the community. “We have implemented a comprehensive testing program to ensure the safety of East Palestine’s water, air, and soil. And we have established a \$1 million community support fund as a down payment on our commitment to help rebuild,” he writes.
- Norfolk Southern launches a website, NSMakingItRight.com, as an information source for residents.
- DeWine requests federal assistance for residents dealing with the aftermath.
- The Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA) says it won’t declare an emergency in East Palestine—at least for now—according to DeWine.
- FEMA declines to help because East Palestine isn’t eligible for disaster assis-

tance, DeWine spokesperson Dan Tierney says. FEMA says the derailment and subsequent chemical spill and release, as well as the burn that sent toxic chemicals into the air, don’t qualify as a traditional disaster, such as a tornado or hurricane, he adds.

Feb. 17

- Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.) announces an investigation into railroad companies’ management of hazardous materials by the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.
- DeWine says he will ensure Norfolk Southern covers all costs resulting from the derailment, including any future expenses if it’s determined that the toxic chemicals spilled and released cause cancer and other ailments.
- Former President Donald Trump announces he will visit East Palestine on Feb. 22.
- FEMA announces it will send a team to East Palestine. DeWine and FEMA Regional Administrator Thomas Sivak issue a joint statement saying that the federal agency has been in “constant contact” with the state and that it and the state have been “working together since day one.”

Feb. 18

- Sens. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) and J.D. Vance (R-Ohio) send a letter to state and federal EPA officials urging them to test for dioxins—pollutants created when chemicals such as vinyl chloride burn.
- Norfolk Southern’s Shaw visits East Palestine and says the company “will be working tirelessly every day

to get East Palestine back on its feet as soon as possible.”

Feb. 20

- Norfolk Southern announces that about 15,000 pounds of contaminated soil and 1.1 million gallons of contaminated water have been removed from the derailment site. The excavated contaminated soil and water will be transported to landfills and disposal facilities that are “designed to accept it safely, in accordance with state and federal regulations,” the railroad explains.
- Norfolk Southern also notes that it already has committed more than \$5.6 million to East Palestine to date, including \$3.4 million in direct financial assistance to families.

Feb. 21

- Norfolk Southern’s CEO says that if his family had a house in East Palestine, he would return home. “I’ve come back multiple times and I’ve drank the water here. I’ve interacted with the families here,” Shaw says. “I think when they really dig into it, they’re going to see that all the testing, whether it’s done by the EPA or local health officials or our independent contractors, shows that it’s safe to return to this community.”
- The Ohio Department of Health opens a clinic in East Palestine to treat patients with symptoms after the derailment. Representatives from the Department of Health and Human Services and the health department of Columbiana County will assist the Ohio Department of Health.
- The EPA announces

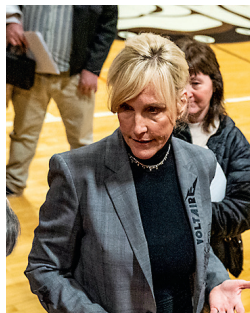
that Norfolk Southern must manage and fund all necessary cleanup related to the derailment. The legally binding order requires that rail companies identify and clean up any contaminated soil and water resources and reimburse the EPA for cleaning services offered to residents and businesses.

Feb. 22

- Trump visits East Palestine, bringing bottled water and cleaning supplies. The former president, who's seeking another term, calls the crash a "tragedy," tells residents that they are "not forgotten," applauds the community as the "tough and resilient heart of America," and praises Conaway, Johnson, Vance, and other officials for their response.



Former President Donald Trump delivers remarks at the East Palestine Fire Department on Feb. 22.



Environmental activist Erin Brockovich speaks to concerned residents on Feb. 24.

Feb. 23

- Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg visits East Palestine for the first time and acknowledges that he could have addressed the disaster sooner. "I felt strongly about this and could have expressed that sooner," he says. "I was taking pains to respect the role that I have and the role that I don't have, but that should not have stopped me from weighing in about how I felt

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg delivers remarks in East Palestine, Ohio, on Feb. 23.



about what was happening to this community."

- The National Transportation Safety Board issues its preliminary report, confirming that an overheated wheel bearing may have been the cause of the derailment. The train's crew didn't receive a warning about the overheated axle until moments before the cars jumped the tracks, at which point an engineer slowed, then stopped the train.

Feb. 24

- Environmental activist Erin Brockovich holds a town hall at East Palestine High School with more than 2,000 in attendance. "Superman is not coming. Nobody is coming to change what has happened to you, magically fix everything, or give you all of the answers," Brockovich says. "You will become the strongest advocate you have."
- President Joe Biden directs teams from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, EPA, and FEMA to visit East Palestine homes starting on Feb. 25. The "walk teams" will visit residents to see what they need and connect them with federal and nonprofit resources.

Feb. 26

- The EPA says shipments of contaminated waste can resume. A portion of the liquid waste will be transported to a facility in Vickery, Ohio. Norfolk Southern will also send some of the solid waste to an incinerator in nearby East Liverpool, Ohio.

Feb. 27

- Ohio Sens. Vance and Brown write a joint letter to the EPA and CDC, urging them to immediately start health screenings for East Palestine residents.

Feb. 28

- EPA Administrator Michael Regan attends a roundtable in East Palestine, recognizing "there has been a deficit of trust" in the federal government during the disaster aftermath.

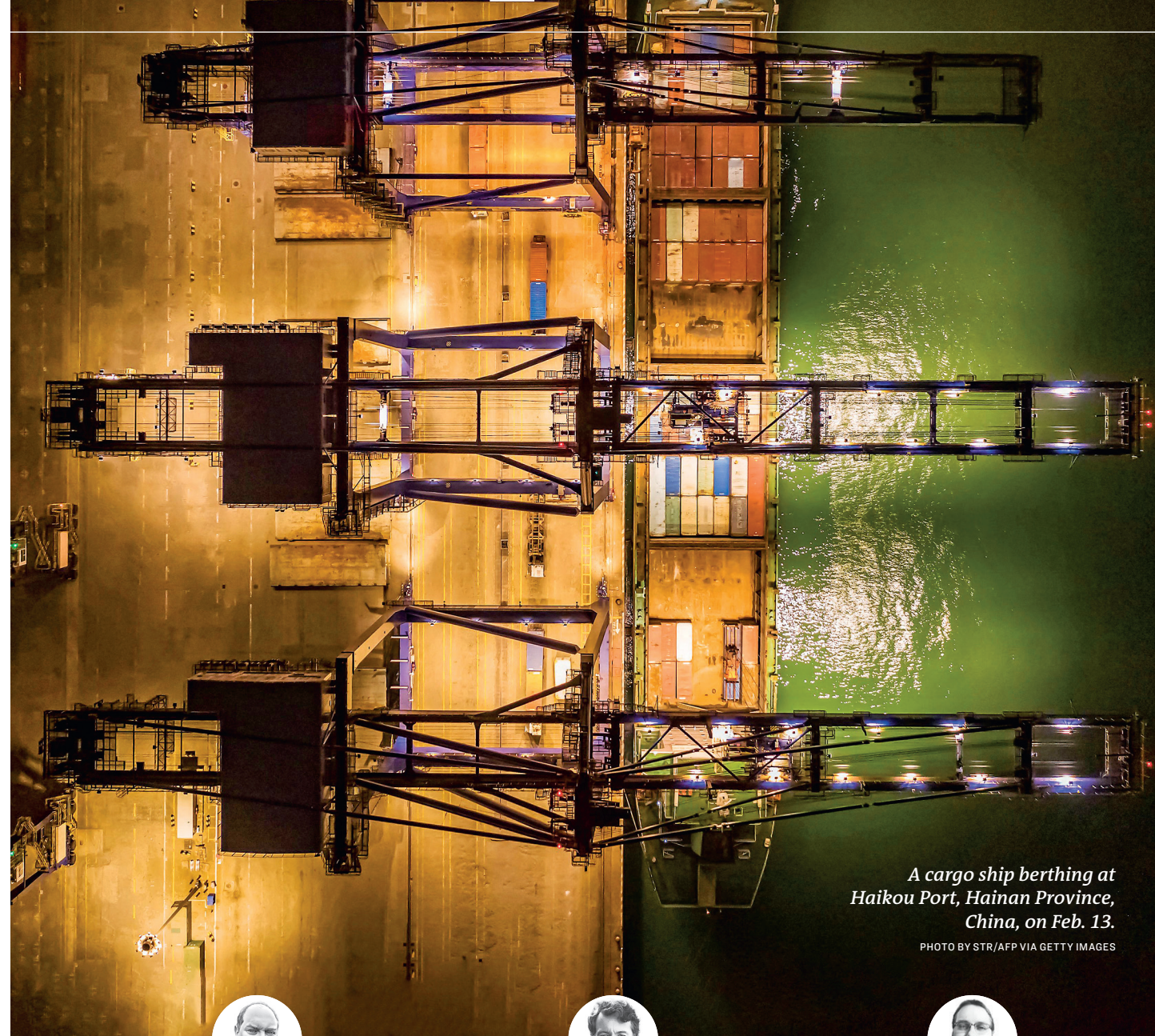
Mar. 1

- Sens. Vance, Brown, Bob Casey (D-Pa.), John Fetterman (D-Pa.), Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), and Josh Hawley (R-Mo.) introduce The Railway Safety Act of 2023 "to prevent future train disasters."

NOTE: This timeline has been updated and reformatted for clarity. ■

THIS PAGE: ALL PHOTOS BY MICHAEL SWENSEN/GETTY IMAGES

Perspectives



A cargo ship berthing at Haikou Port, Hainan Province, China, on Feb. 13.

PHOTO BY STR/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



WORKWEEK AT BERNIE'S
The four-day workweek is a capitalist idea. **58**



CHINA'S ECONOMIC PROSPECTS WORSEN
Another CEO's disappearance and stock losses are just the beginning. **59**



WARREN BUFFETT'S MESSAGE TO BIDEN
The billionaire investor referred to critics as economically "illiterate." **61**

INSIDE

Thomas McArdle



Workweek at Bernie's

The 4-day workweek is a capitalist idea

SOME 61 VARIED BRITISH businesses with a total of 2,900 employees recently participated over the course of six months in the largest experiment of a four-day workweek, effectively providing their workers with a paid day off a week.

Conducted by the British think tank Autonomy, two nonprofits, and researchers at Cambridge and Boston College, the goal was to ascertain whether the increased time off would lessen stress and burnout while maintaining or even increasing productivity and revenue, as well as test the effects on employee health and turnover.

The findings were tremendously positive, with more than 90 percent of the businesses favoring the continuation of the practice, 18 of whom intended to make a four-day week permanent.

Quick to weigh in was Vermont's democratic socialist Sen. Bernie Sanders, who wrote on Twitter: "With exploding technology and increased worker productivity, it's time to move toward a four-day workweek with no loss of pay. Workers must benefit from technology, not just corporate CEOs."

You see, it's an ancient Marxist slander against the free market that private sector employers seek to drain every drop of labor out of their workers, and so it was vital for Sanders to brand the four-day workweek with the progressive seal of approval before Republicans began touting the idea. (The senator, however, is actually quite late to the party since all the way back in 1956, Vice President Richard Nixon was promising that Eisenhower's economic policies would mean a four-day workweek for Americans in the "not too distant future.")

In Chapter 10 of "Das Kapital," Marx

warns that the owner of a private business is "capital personified. His soul is the soul of capital." And capital seeks to "absorb the greatest possible amount of surplus-labor."

Marx declared: "Capital is dead labor, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks. The time during which the laborer works, is the time during which the capitalist consumes the labor-power he has purchased of him. If the laborer consumes his disposable time for himself, he robs the capitalist."

In communist mainland China, a '996' work culture has long been the de facto norm, with employees working from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., six days a week.

The notion that the Dracula who pays you the money you use for your family's livelihood would choose to suck out less of your blood and sweat, and would actually actively promote a shorter workweek for his employees, is 180 degrees opposed to what Marx prophesied; capitalists are supposed to want to work you into the ground. Just as business owners deigning to share their profits with grateful workers contradicts Marxist theory that the proletariat would rise up and smash the bourgeoisie. Vast majorities of Americans, spanning party and ideology, it turns out, like receiving a share of the profits.

Curious how those working for Sanders's 2020 presidential campaign were allegedly treated in this regard. One Sanders campaign worker, in the early days of that campaign, actually filed a complaint with the Nation-

al Labor Relations Board (NLRB) charging that employees would be punished by Sanders's campaign if they attempted to organize and seek a collective bargaining agreement. Sanders also cut workers' hours so he could pay them less (in contrast to the four-day week idea, which maintains 40-hours' pay).

In the Soviet Union, where Sanders and his wife spent their honeymoon in 1988, its 66 million non-farm workers were required to labor some six days a week until no sooner than 1967, when the Kremlin acceded to a five-day workweek. And in communist mainland China, a "996" work culture has long been the de-facto norm, with employees working from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., six days a week, despite unenforced laws limiting a work day to eight hours, and a workweek to 44 hours.

Such labor laws are obviously as valueless as Articles 35 and 36 of the People's Republic of China's Constitution, which laughably guarantee that "citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of procession and of demonstration" as well as "freedom of religious belief." And that "no State organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion."

Such preposterous constitutional rights didn't stop Beijing from convicting and incarcerating 90-year-old Cardinal Joseph Zen for helping those protesting for freedom in Hong Kong.

Despite Sanders's attempts to take credit for the four-day workweek, it's a capitalist idea; the vampires that Marx theorized about, thirsty for slave labor, are turning out to be his own red-handed followers.

Anders Corr



China's Economic Prospects Worsen

Another CEO disappearance and stock losses are just the beginning

THREE CHINESE TECH companies on Feb. 21 lost \$33 billion in value in U.S. stock trading. Alibaba Group, JD.com, and PDD Holdings are finding it harder to expand internationally, and so have turned to cutthroat competition with each other for domestic markets that will likely demolish their prices and profits.

While within the past few months, Beijing signaled an end to its tech crackdown, canceled three-year COVID lockdowns, and claimed at Davos to be open for business again, the cheer for investors was wary, short lived, and followed by a hangover.

Foreign investors unwound from China after Beijing cracked down on the country's most successful tech businesses and their leaders, most dramatically the disappearance of Jack Ma in 2020. The regime canceled his Ant Group's initial public offering (IPO), expected to be the world's most lucrative at more than \$34 billion.

Didi, China's top ride-hailing company, IPOed in the United States in 2021 for \$4.4 billion. Days later, Beijing banned its app. The company was delisted from the New York Stock Exchange, lost about 70 percent of its value, and was investigated by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

Now, after all that bilking of international investors, Beijing is trying to court foreign money through IPOs again, but still without assured forms of shareholder ownership and robust corporate protections from taxes, overregulation, and arbitrary detention of company leadership.

In February, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) apparently disappeared another billionaire tech titan named Bao Fan. There were no public charges, but his likely crime was a recent attempt to move some of his wealth to a family office in Singapore from China.

When foreigners invest in China stocks, they typically do so under increasingly strict regulatory control and variable interest entities (VIE), a "spider-web of contractual obligations" that doesn't actually confer ownership in the Chinese company, according to Financial Times.

Xi Jinping is shackling the economy with throwback communist management, while simultaneously attempting to leverage it for the CCP's planned takeover of Taiwan by 2049.

Investors have bought about \$2 trillion worth of Chinese VIEs, thinking they own something more than a wish and promise dependent on Beijing's continued indulgence of foreign capitalists. They ultimately have little legal protection—the communist regime rules by the personalistic power of Xi Jinping rather than established market principles.

Additionally, the SEC has failed to gain reporting compliance from Chinese companies for years. Accounting firms—such as KPMG, PwC, Deloitte, and EY—must now have access to the books of Chinese companies listed in the United States or the companies will be delisted from U.S. exchanges.

But actually acquiring the data requires unprecedented and continued pressure from U.S. authorities. A report on Feb. 22 revealed that Beijing is telling its state-owned companies that they should let contracts with these Big Four firms expire. It's an unfriendly indicator of the value of even non-state-owned Chinese companies.

As the CCP continues down its adversarial path, economic counter-

measures are increasing. Nowhere is evidence of this trend more apparent than in Xi's attempts to sanction-proof his economy by moving away from the U.S. dollar and overcoming export controls through tech autarchy.

On Feb. 23, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen warned Beijing that any help it gave to Russia in "systemic sanctions evasion" would result in "serious consequences." Such consequences would likely involve secondary sanctions and increased export controls. In the long term, Beijing's support of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine also could lead to increased tariffs.

Beijing's recent call for "dialogue and negotiations" between Russia and Ukraine shouldn't be taken as progress. Russian leader Vladimir Putin will use negotiations to solidify his conquests in Crimea and the Donbas, empowering him for further conquest later. Appeasing Putin incentivizes and legitimates conquest, including of Taiwan by China.

That Xi is actively planning as much is indicated by his attempts to reorient China's economy toward domestic consumers. However, that path is replete with transaction costs, as most of its exports currently go to the United States, European Union, Japan, South Korea, and India. None of these countries look kindly on Xi's rule, and all could band together to increase sanctions.

The fundamental risks in China's investment atmosphere have thus worsened. Xi is shackling the economy with throwback communist management, while simultaneously attempting to leverage it for the CCP's planned takeover of Taiwan by 2049 and the dangerously ambitious goal of global hegemony to follow.

Both will be difficult for Beijing to achieve, to say the least. They entail a massive drain on China's economy and increased risk to the political and economic stability of East Asia and beyond.



Inflation Has Returned

The problem wasn't as easily solved as some hoped it would be

AFTER SOME encouraging news last summer and fall, many began anticipating a quick end to the economy's inflation problem.

Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell even suggested that he might not have been so wrong in 2021, when he declared the inflationary pressure “transitory.”

The news from January contradicts that optimism. The Labor Department reported that consumer prices rose by 0.5 percent in January, 6.2 percent stated at an annual rate, and that producer prices rose by 0.7 percent, 8.7 percent stated at an annual rate. Neither shows anything good about the inflation situation.

Of course, one month's data alone don't make a trend. But there's ample reason to expect more such troublesome inflation news when the January report is set against the pattern of 2022—both its periods of intensity and relief—and the detail behind the summary figures.

That news will demand still more counter-inflationary policy from the Fed and, hopeless as it seems, some support for counter-inflationary policies in Congress and from the White House.

One reason to expect future trouble lies in the pattern of energy prices. The January Consumer Price Index (CPI) showed a 2 percent rise for the month, 26.8 percent stated at an annual rate. This jump reversed much of the relief reported in previous months.

To be sure, energy price moves are notoriously volatile. The import here comes from juxtaposing these price trends and Russia's recent decision to reduce supplies. At base, Russia's moves have less impact than the White House frequently suggests. After all, energy prices during this

past year have gotten better and worse even as Russia's position and the Ukraine fighting have continued uninterrupted.

But if Russia's announcement will have ill effects, they're yet to appear. It's too soon to say that it appeared in the reported energy price inflation. The same is true of the 5 percent January rise in producer energy prices. This means that any ill effects of Russian action will occur just as the recent surge at the producer level works through to retail pricing.

One reason to expect future trouble lies in the pattern of energy prices.

Also suggesting future inflation problems is the picture that emerges from the major components of the CPI. Food prices, for example—both groceries and restaurant meals amounting to some 13.5 percent of the average household budget—rose by 0.5 percent in January, bringing the increase over the past 12 months to more than 10 percent.

The price of shelter—rent and ownership and more than one-third of the average household budget—rose by 0.7 percent in January, bringing the rise over the previous 12 months to about 8 percent.

Not every subcategory of the CPI rose. The prices of new cars and trucks rose by a relatively moderate 0.2 percent in January, but most other important parts of the index did rise too much. Apparel prices increased by 0.8 percent in January, and the prices of transportation services rose by some 0.9 percent.

Perhaps even more telling of future price pressures is the pattern exhibited by what might be

described as the pricing pipeline. As already indicated, the overall measure of producer prices in January outpaced the consumer measure.

The producer picture does indicate some relief on grocery prices. Producer food prices declined by 1 percent in January and even more at the farm level. The crude energy process also declined by some 16.2 percent, although, with Russia's decision to cut back production, gasoline prices on commodity markets are rising again.

Otherwise, the prices of finished producer goods increased rapidly. Durable producer goods—appliances, cars, and the like—rose by 0.5 percent in January, and the prices of nondurable goods—soap, cosmetics, and the like—rose by some 0.9 percent. Construction costs rose by 0.8 percent, suggesting little immediate relief in the cost of shelter.

On these bases, inflation seems set to continue. It can't lift easily because, at base, it has little to do with the usual excuses offered by Washington—corporate greed and Russia's maneuvers. Instead, the nation will continue to suffer inflationary pressures because the Fed in 2020 and 2021 orchestrated a huge surge in money creation.

Whenever money growth exceeds the economy's ability to respond, the result is inflation, if not immediately, then ultimately. Between December 2019 and February 2022, the Fed's broad definition of money circulating in the economy rose by almost 42 percent, nearly 20 percent yearly.

No economy, especially one as large and well-developed as the United States, can keep up with that. This disparity lies at the root of today's inflation and tomorrow's, too, until the Fed's otherwise admirable recent counter-inflationary policies remove it. That will require more effort over more time.



Warren Buffett's Message to Biden

The billionaire investor referred to critics as economically 'illiterate'

IN HIS HIGHLY ANTICIPATED annual letter to Berkshire Hathaway shareholders, which came out on Feb. 25, billionaire investor Warren Buffett slammed the federal government's stance on stock buybacks.

During his State of the Union address, President Joe Biden proposed quadrupling the tax on corporate stock buybacks to 4 percent. The tax was initially introduced in the Inflation Reduction Act.

Many Democrats have championed this policy, too, arguing that the revenue-raising levy would diminish tax avoidance for corporations and affluent shareholders. Critics say that corporations should spend this money to enhance employee benefits and bolster investments. But supporters say that buybacks improve earnings per share growth.

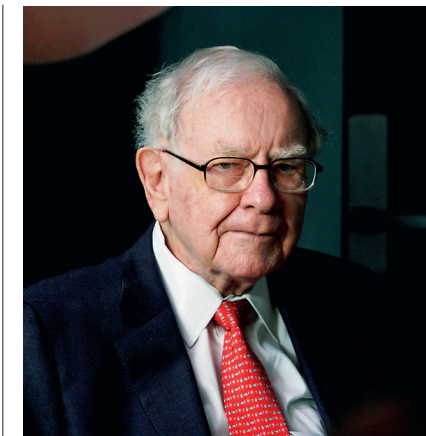
Berkshire Hathaway launched a share buyback program in late 2011. The conglomerate spent a record \$27 billion on buybacks last year as Buffett saw few opportunities to invest in other areas.

The so-called Oracle of Omaha contended that buybacks help shareholders as they increase the per-share intrinsic value.

“The math isn't complicated: When the share count goes down, your interest in our many businesses goes up. Every small bit helps if repurchases are made at value-accretive prices,” Buffett said. “Gains from value-accretive repurchases, it should be emphasized, benefit all owners—in every respect.

“When you are told that all repurchases are harmful to shareholders or to the country, or particularly beneficial to CEOs, you are listening to either an economic illiterate or a silver-tongued demagogue (characters that are not mutually exclusive).”

In his letter, the legendary investor



Buffett contended that buybacks help shareholders as they increase the per-share intrinsic value.

tor also touted his confidence in the U.S. economy while also warning about “runaway inflation” from the consequences of fiscal deficits over the past decade.

Buffett encouraged investors to concentrate on the long-term rather than short-term volatile conditions, arguing that betting against the United States has never worked out in his nearly six decades running the Omaha, Nebraska-based multinational conglomerate holding company.

After decades of investing, he still has yet to lose any of his confidence in the world's largest economy, Buffett noted.

“We count on the American Tailwind and, though it has been becalmed from time to time, its propelling force has always returned,” he wrote.

“I have been investing for 80 years—more than one-third of our country's lifetime. Despite our citizens' penchant—almost enthusiasm—

for self-criticism and self-doubt, I have yet to see a time when it made sense to make a long-term bet against America. And I doubt very much that any reader of this letter will have a different experience in the future.”

Echoing the sentiment of Charlie Munger, vice chairman of Berkshire Hathaway, Buffett said the “patient investor” will consistently outperform the “foolish gamblers.”

His famed annual letter was also accompanied by the company's year-end results, which showcased a record \$30.8 billion operating profit and a \$22.8 billion annual loss.

At the end of 2022, Berkshire's cash stockpile totaled close to \$130 billion.

Year-to-date, Berkshire Hathaway Inc. Class B shares are down by about 2 percent to around \$304.

On the subject of taxes and deficits, Buffett has been an advocate for raising taxes on the ultra-wealthy. According to Buffett, officials at Berkshire “hope and expect to pay much more in taxes during the next decade.”

“We owe the country no less,” he said.

Despite his enthusiasm for paying more taxes, Buffett alluded to the lack of fiscal management in Washington, noting that the U.S. government received \$32.3 trillion in taxes during the decade ending in 2021 while it spent \$43.9 trillion.

“Huge and entrenched fiscal deficits have consequences,” he wrote, noting that Berkshire provides “modest protection from runaway inflation.”

Buffett also noted that if 1,000 taxpayers matched Berkshire's \$32 billion tax payments during the decade, “no other business nor any of the country's 131 million households would have needed to pay any taxes to the federal government. Not a dime.”

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



Inflationary Policies Destroy Wages

No sector has seen a rise in wages that exceeds inflation

WHEN WE READ about the U.S. economy, we often get wage growth as a signal of a strong labor market. It's hardly a strong market when the labor participation rate and the employment-to-population ratio are both below February 2020 levels and have been stagnant for months.

Additionally, the headline figure of 4.6 percent annualized wage growth is misleading, as it shows a nominal and average figure that disguises a much tougher environment. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, “From December 2021 to December 2022, real average hourly earnings decreased 1.1 percent, seasonally adjusted.”

When we look at wage growth by sector, the picture is even worse. According to JPMorgan, no sector in the U.S. economy has seen a rise in wages that covers inflation. Only two sectors in the U.S. economy—information and financial services—show more than 2 percent wage growth in annualized seasonally adjusted January figures. Furthermore, construction, manufacturing, education, health services, retail, leisure, and hospitality, as well as professional business services show a negative nominal annualized change of minus 2 to minus 6 percent. This means an even worse real figure after discounting inflation.

When we look at such a scary loss of real disposable income, two things come to mind. First, in the euro area, it's even worse, as there's barely any nominal wage growth to start with. Second, and most importantly, citizens don't understand it, but the middle class is being eroded by the combination of inflationary policies, money printing, and bloating of government spending, added to protectionism, trade barriers, and regulatory burdens.

Inflation isn't a coincidence; it's a policy. Massively increasing money supply



The middle class is being eroded by the combination of inflationary policies, money printing, and bloating of government spending, added to protectionism, trade barriers, and regulatory burdens.

has brought levels of core inflation that many would have never imagined.

Think about this. If even in the years when the mainstream said that there was “no inflation” we all saw the cost of housing, health care, education, and nonreplicable goods and services rise well above real wage growth, imagine what's happening now to households.

Inflation may be cooling, but that doesn't mean low prices or even improving living standards.

How is consumption holding up in such a negative environment? Basically, because citizens are using their savings or taking on more debt, hoping that the message coming from authorities about lower inflation may bring prices back to where they were in 2019. However, that's unlikely unless there's a massive crisis or governments dras-

tically cut their enormous spending plans and protectionist agenda.

When governments announce “anti-inflation” plans based on spending even more of what's already a massive budget with an enormous deficit, they aren't combating inflation, they're prolonging it.

Governments don't need to implement anti-inflation measures because it's government spending and political trade barriers that cause inflation. Inflation isn't an external phenomenon; it's the destruction of the purchasing power of the currency due to political decisions.

It's so evident it was a monetary phenomenon that in the middle of the Ukraine invasion, commodities made a U-turn and ended 2022 flat or down on the year after a couple of rate hikes from the Fed.

One of the worst inflationary policies is protectionism. Protectionism places barriers to trade under the promise that we'll buy and sell our own products and live happily ever after.

Artificial money creation is never neutral. Government spending is always paid for by you, even if you're poor, through taxes, inflation, or both.

The narrative now is to convince you that 5 percent annual inflation is a step in the right direction just to make you believe that 3 or 4 percent will be a success. By the time you accept 4 percent annual inflation as an acceptable outcome, the purchasing power of your wages will have fallen by more than 20 percent.

Many will blame capitalism for all I've mentioned, but the reality is that the policy of middle-class impoverishment comes from two decades of rising interventionism, more government interference in the economy, rising protectionism, and widespread inflationism. None of that has anything to do with capitalism and everything to do with statism.

ANDY JACOBSON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

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Fan Yu

Unaffordable Car Prices

Lower inventory means higher sale prices

AVERAGE NEW CAR PRICES have hit record highs. U.S. auto prices had been increasing for years before COVID-19. But heading into this year, there was hope that with higher inventories on the horizon and computer chip supply-chain issues behind us, prices would ease.

If only that were the case. For consumers already struggling with high inflation, the hits keep coming.

All data points suggest that car prices are at a record high and might even rise higher. Kelley Blue Book—the auto industry benchmark—stated that January new car prices rose 5.9 percent since a year ago, to \$49,388. To repeat: The average new car price in America is now about \$50,000. The Cox Automotive/Moody's survey reports that the average car payment as of December 2022 was a record-high \$777 per month.

The used car market is also red hot. For the first 15 days of February, used car prices increased 4.1 percent from January, according to Cox Automotive's Manheim used vehicle pricing index. The index tracks average prices dealerships pay at wholesale auctions.

The used car index has been going up since last November, after just a few months of reprieve in mid-2022.

Both are key components of the Consumer Price Index (CPI), the widely used measure of inflation. Used and new car prices together make up an 8.1 percent weighting in the CPI, given the importance of driving in this country. And there doesn't appear to be any relief on the horizon.

Let's start with the used car market. Deals are nowhere to be found, with prices today almost 50 percent higher than pre-pandemic. And it's partially caused by the pandemic.

The three-year-old model is a popular used car purchase. Three years



All data points suggest that car prices are at a record and perhaps will rise even higher.

ago, at the onset of COVID-19, new car sales dropped more than 15 percent. That means that today, there are fewer of those three-year-old models on sale as pre-owned vehicles. And lower volume of new car sales caused by microchip shortages and supply chain issues means used car inventories will remain tight over the next few years.

Who are the winners of this phenomenon? Dealerships.

Autonation, the country's biggest auto dealership chain, reported blow-out fourth-quarter earnings results, beating analyst expectations on both revenues and bottom line. That propelled its share price to all-time highs on Feb. 17.

Of course, Autonation's fortunes were driven by high consumer demand for cars and low inventories. This means fewer promotions and higher prices. Because of the unaffordability of new cars, Autonation focused on selling used vehicles, a product segment that has higher margins for dealers.

CEO Mike Manley, on the company

earnings call with Wall Street analysis, called the current state of the industry “an exciting time.”

The market has even rewarded struggling online used car dealer Carvana. The company, whose financial condition and solvency has been scrutinized, has seen its share price rise more than 145 percent since Jan. 1.

What about new cars? Used car supply can't be increased, but manufacturers can build more new cars to ease pricing, right? Theoretically, yes, but automakers haven't been making more cars in the past few years.

New car prices are skyrocketing, and margins are high. There are few incentives for automakers to change course. Automakers have recently discovered that they don't need to build more cars; they can instead sell add-ons and software subscriptions—such as assisted driving capabilities—to garner recurring revenues.

One dealership contact, who wishes to remain anonymous, said: “The chip shortage is not completely over. But they are choosing to put available chips into top-of-the-line loaded [or higher-priced] vehicles. There is barely any base [or cheaper] models sitting on dealer lots.”

And many automakers don't plan to change course. General Motors Chief Financial Officer Paul Jacobson told analysts in January that the company is targeting production to amount to “50 to 60 days of total dealer inventory” by the end of the year. This means supplying dealerships with a number of cars that can be sold in a 50- to 60-day timeframe. That figure is about 20 to 30 days lower than before the pandemic.

In other words, automakers are actively looking to keep inventory low. Lower inventory means higher sale prices. And with interest rates so high, consumers are faced with monthly payments that are higher than ever.

MARIO TAMAYO/GETTY IMAGES



Brianne Dressen,
co-chair of React19.

THOUGHT LEADERS

The Vaccine Injured Are Speaking Out

Clinical trial patient says side-effects information 'hidden, swept under the rug'

“THIS ISN'T depression or some psychosomatic issue,” Brianne Dressen says. “Your legs are failing, you’ve got electrical shocks, you’ve got severe tinnitus, you can’t see right, and you can’t think straight.”

In a recent episode of “American Thought Leaders,” host Jan Jekielek spoke with Brianne Dressen, a wife, mother, and former preschool teacher in Utah who was severely injured after participating in AstraZeneca’s COVID-19 vaccine clinical trial in November 2020. She is the co-chair of React19, the leading nonprofit organization aiding those who have been injured by the genetic vaccines.

JAN JEKIELEK: It’s been a year since you helped introduce us to the realities facing the vaccine injured in America. What I want to hear is your personal story and what happened to you.

BRIANNE DRESSEN: Before my vaccine, I was healthy. I was a mother of two young kids and a preschool teacher. I was definitely all in on the vaccine. I firmly believed that if I got vaccinated, I wouldn’t spread the disease to others. I wanted to do everything I could to take care of those around me.

So I signed up for a clinical trial with AstraZeneca and got my shot on Nov. 4, 2020. Within an hour, I had tingling down the same arm of my shot. Later that night, my vision had become blurry and double. Within 2 1/2 weeks, I landed in the hospital after four ER visits.

Each visit had new symptoms, severe tachycardia, bradycardia, and limb weakness. The paresthesia moved from one arm to the other to all over my body. There was this horrific electric shock all over my body that I deal with to this day. And severe tinnitus—a freight train sound in one

“But what you know inside your body is that this is not anxiety. This isn’t depression or some psychosomatic issue.”

ear and a high E in the other.

When I landed in the hospital, my legs weren’t working and I had become incontinent. My sensitivity to light and sound had become so severe that my kids couldn’t be in the same room with me. My husband would check on me, and just the swishing of his pants was painful in my ears. I had to hole up in a room by myself 24/7.

The doctors weren’t sure what it was. They didn’t run typical tests to rule out GBS [Guillain-Barré syndrome] or transverse myelitis or those other neurological issues associated with vaccines, although not common. Instead, they slapped me with the label of anxiety due to the COVID vaccine. Four days later, I was discharged with intensive in-home physical and occupational therapy to rehab my legs and my cognitive deficits.

MR. JEKIELEK: It sounds unbelievable that the symptoms you describe would be diagnosed as anxiety.

MS. DRESSEN: Because I was the first at that point, or one of the first, I gave the doctors a lot of leeway. It was clear they had never seen anything like it and didn’t really understand it.

Now, this has happened to tens of thousands of Americans that I know of. Most likely, there are far more, where physicians are unbelieving

or just dismissive of their patients’ complaints.

But what you know inside your body is that this is not anxiety. This isn’t depression or some psychosomatic issue. Your legs are failing, you’ve got electrical shocks, you’ve got severe tinnitus, you can’t see right, and you can’t think straight.

MR. JEKIELEK: Presumably, you reached out to the people involved in the trial.

MS. DRESSEN: I have yet to speak to a real human at the drug company. I’ve talked to people at the clinical trial office. When my husband and I became financially ruined because of this, we reached out to the drug company and the clinical trial company, begging for help. We had to refinance our house because they did not own up to their part of our contract. The contract says they will pay for any and all expenses resulting from injury.

MR. JEKIELEK: That first diagnosis seems critical here.

MS. DRESSEN: That anxiety diagnosis plagued me for six or seven months until I went to the NIH [National Institutes of Health]. It didn’t matter how many doctors I saw, what tests I had run. If I cried even a little in a doctor’s office because my life was ruined, then yes, it was all in my head.

They told me it was anxiety so many times that I saw a psychiatrist, who did a full neuropsychological evaluation. He said, “I’m not sure what this is, but it isn’t anxiety. There’s something going on in your body.”

Finally, the NIH took pity on me and flew me there to be treated.

MR. JEKIELEK: Please explain how that worked. ♦

“My sensitivity to light and sound had become so severe that my kids couldn’t be in the same room with me.”

MS. DRESSEN: My husband is a chemist, and he realized early on that the doctors and the drug company weren’t going to do anything. He had to be the one to figure it out. He started digging into the studies and reaching out to researchers all over the globe.

A lead researcher in Germany got my blood a month after my injury, and my test results showed I was positive for anti-neuronal autoantibodies, which means your immune system is attacking your nerves. Even then, it was labeled as anxiety.

My husband reached out to Dr. Avindra Nath and Dr. Farinaz Safavi at the NIH on Jan. 11, 2021, about a month and a half into my injury. They replied right away. There was another person here in the United States who had a similar cascade of symptoms after her COVID vaccine from AstraZeneca. We got her in touch with the NIH. So two of us were complaining about the same thing.

We don’t know if it’s directly correlated, but 10 days later, AstraZeneca was pulled off the market. At that point, the NIH had started a study investigating COVID vaccine injuries that were neurological in nature. They collected samples from people all over the country.

I was patient No. 1 in that study, and my friend Dr. Denise Hertz, a California gastroenterologist, was patient No. 2. So they studied us and others. The amount of knowledge the NIH has on the COVID vaccine injuries is

very detailed. Yet the public is told that the vaccines are safe, period.

This information has all been hidden—swept under the rug and minimized—instead of investigating these cases, collecting the data, and using that information to help those like us and who came after us from becoming as chronic and severe as we are.

MR. JEKIELEK: The NIH treatment helped you profoundly as I understand it, right?

MS. DRESSEN: Yes. I’ve told Dr. Nath he’s one of the main reasons why I’m still alive. He was the guy at the NIH calling my doctors and saying: “Look, your patient isn’t crazy. There’s something wrong with her. You need to help her.”

So I have almost a survivor’s guilt. Why was I one of the few selected to get that golden ticket to the NIH, to have my trajectory of recovery essentially changed, when tens of thousands of Americans deserve the same treatment? They weren’t afforded that because the people that could do this stayed silent.

MR. JEKIELEK: How does your organization, React19, fund itself?

MS. DRESSEN: React19 is a nonprofit that was organized because the government wasn’t doing its job. The injured realized, “If no one is coming to save us, we’ve got to do it ourselves.”

So it was started by the injured

for the injured. In one short year, we have amassed over 21,000 COVID vaccine injured just here in the United States. That number could be up to 27,000, 30,000 easily. And we have close to two dozen international partners across the globe. One hundred percent of the donations go to supporting the injured. We are also 100 percent volunteer-run, which I’m very proud of.

We have an advocacy program in which an injured is assigned an advocate, like a buddy system. They listen to them and figure out their constellation of symptoms. They help them find local doctors who are compassionate and willing to help them.

We love those people. We know their names and their families. We want to do everything we can to help them get their lives back and stop the progression of their disease. In turn, these people will be able to share their voices against this injustice so it doesn’t happen again.

MR. JEKIELEK: What’s on the horizon for React19?

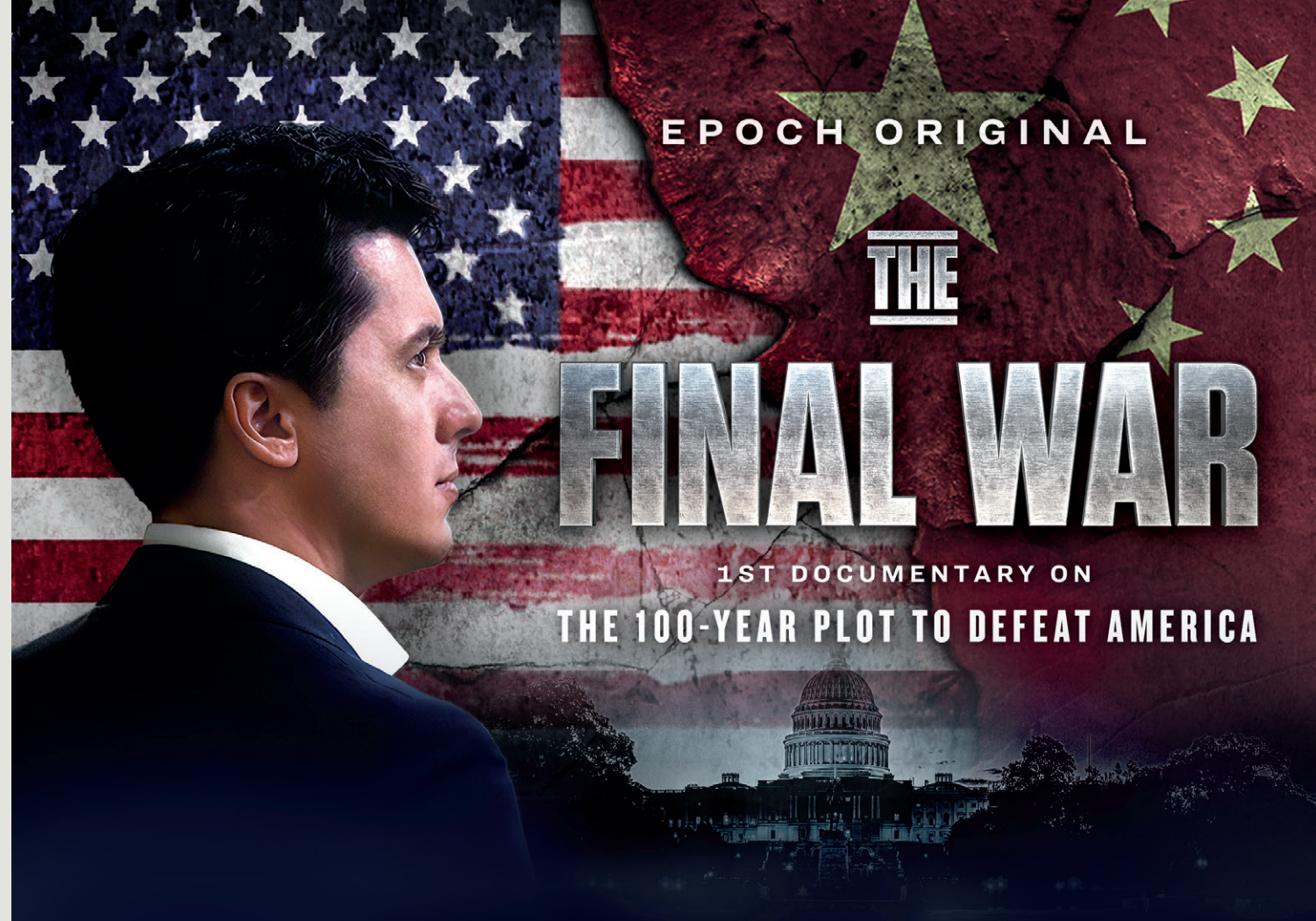
MS. DRESSEN: We’ve got to get these people better, and we’ve got to get the truth out. We’re going to do everything we can to make sure that investigations happen, that people are held accountable, and that policies are changed.

We the people have to demand better from our elected officials, the pharmaceutical companies, and the media. Until we generate a public outcry, policy will not shift. Without question, they’ll do the same thing to people again when the next emergency appears.

MR. JEKIELEK: It sounds like you have a lot of work ahead of you.

MS. DRESSEN: Yes. ■

This interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.



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WAR” is a film that is so relevant to current events and so important that we’re offering it to EVERYONE for free. It will answer your questions about the pandemic, the impending invasion of Taiwan, and how the CCP works to keep the U.S. occupied with at least four global adversaries.

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Positive, Friendly Attitudes are Contagious

Giving friends, family, and strangers the gift of a warm smile

By Jeff Minick



S EARCH ONLINE FOR “TIPS for job interviews” and you’ll find many of the sites offering the same advice: Dress appropriately, stand tall, speak clearly, pay attention, maintain eye contact, shake hands firmly, ask questions, show some enthusiasm—and bring a smile.

Some studies have demonstrated that first impressions are formed not in minutes, not even in seconds, but in the blink of an eye. In “How Many Seconds to a First Impression?” Eric Wargo reported that researchers showed participants photographs of unfamiliar people for less than a second, then asked them to judge that person’s character. Their answers strongly correlated with participants who underwent the same test without these time constraints. In other words, whether accurate or not, first impressions lead to snap judgments and quick conclusions.

This study came to mind the other day when a round of errands took me to the county tax office, the post office, the grocery store, a coffee shop, and a gift shop on Main Street. In only one of these establishments did an employee give a positive first impression. The young woman in the gift shop wore jeans and a flannel shirt, her hair could have used some time with a brush, and she sported a tattoo on her wrist, but her smile as I approached the sales counter coupled with her bright “Hey there!” were

sunshine on that cloudy day.

That clerk’s smile brought to mind a lesson taught to me years ago while waiting tables in a Charlottesville, Virginia, restaurant. You were there to make a customer’s meal pleasant, not drag them into your own mood. If you wanted larger tips, you left your problems at the door, became an actor, and brought a smile along with the menu to the table.

That simple act may offer them a bright moment on an otherwise tough day.

The power of a smile is well-known. A glum sales rep might as well have stayed in bed, which is why some companies instruct their employees to put on an authentic smile when dealing with the public. Excited parents call their friends when their infant smiles for the first time—“He’s so cute! You should see him!” Most of us have passed a stranger who slipped us a smile, and we not only smiled back but felt a little extra lilt in our step.

Smiling is also good for us. It likely lowers blood pressure, boosts the immune system, and, if we’re genuinely happy, may even help us live longer. In “10 Big Benefits of Smiling,” Mark Stibich writes that “smiling helps you stay positive.”

“Try this test: Smile. Now try to think

of something negative without losing that smile. It’s hard, isn’t it?” he wrote.

Just for sport, I accepted Stibich’s challenge, smiled, thought “The world is going to Hades in a handbasket,” and burst out laughing.

Smiling benefits others as well. Next time you come home from work, bring a smile to your spouse, children, or roommate and see what happens. That simple act may offer them a bright moment on an otherwise tough day. Try the same thing when you enter the workplace, and kick the day off right.

Smiling changes our whole demeanor. Sometimes, you can even “hear” a friend smiling as they speak with you on the phone. When film star Paul Newman smiled, that handsome face crinkled up and those blue eyes sparkled. That man made smiling an art.

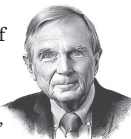
What more could you ask? A smile costs you nothing, keeps you healthy, brings a jolt of hope and joy to others, and wins hearts.

Oh, and one more thing (a joke): “I decided to make sure my mom woke up with a big smile this morning. “Now she won’t let me play with Sharpies anymore.”

So, did you smile?

If so, there you go. That’s the concept.

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



You no longer need to be a “royal” to enjoy unlimited access to some of the best historic royal palaces and gardens in England.

PHOTO BY IMAGE SOURCE PINK/GETTY IMAGES

An Intimate Glimpse of Royal Life 72

WHILE MOST BEER IS enjoyed soon after it’s brewed, it turns out that wine isn’t the only beverage that gets better with age. 75

WHETHER YOU HAVE A LARGE yard or live in a tiny apartment, creating your own garden will allow you to enjoy the taste of vegetables fresh off the vine. 76

CHRONOGRAPHS PAY homage to the thrill of speed, for both race drivers and motorsports enthusiasts alike. 79

INSIDE



This casual gathering area of the main residence features huge windows to let in the light and afford an unobstructed view of the grounds.

An Amazing Residence

THE LARGEST WATERFRONT ESTATE IN GREENWICH

By Phil Butler

ONE OF THE MOST PRESTIGIOUS and expensive estates in the United States is currently available for purchase. At 50 acres in size, it's the largest waterfront estate in Greenwich, Connecticut, located on a private peninsula overlooking Long Island Sound. Once known as Kinraig, the home of the Lauder Greenway family beginning in the 1890s has a mile of water frontage and its own private island.

The sprawling estate consists of a stately 13,500-square-foot main residence, a carriage house, a gatehouse, a pool house, and two guest houses, all accented by lush lawns and manicured gardens. The main residence is set behind private gates, where a 1,800-foot driveway meanders up to the imposing twin rock towers that bracket the front entrance of the French Renaissance-style home.

Inside the four-story home are eight bedrooms, 10 baths, and nine fireplaces, with all areas exhibiting impressive craftsmanship. The interior features 12-foot-tall ceilings throughout and a fabulous living room that flows into a solarium with coffered ceilings.

Built in 1898, the interior is a lovingly maintained Victorian delight. A cozy breakfast nook adjacent to the well-equipped and extremely spacious gourmet kitchen is ideal for casual family dining. The owners and guests are also afforded a library, a formal dining room, numerous private sitting and entertaining areas, and a partially finished basement that's the perfect setting for wintertime hobbies.

Outside of the main residence is a 75-foot heated pool, surrounded by stone terraces and adjacent to the octagonally shaped pool house. Acres of lavish lawns surround several outbuildings and two greenhouses. Other notable features of this grand estate include a grass tennis court, two private beaches, wooden stairs leading to the water's edge, an apple orchard, and a stone carriage house accented with a clock tower. The property has plenty of room for guests and staff in the form of a one-bedroom apartment and three bedrooms in the gatehouse at the estate's entrance. ■

Phil Butler is a publisher, editor, author, and analyst who is a widely cited expert on subjects ranging from digital and social media to travel technology.



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(Above) This view of the main residence from the shoreline reveals the 75-foot-long pool, manicured gardens, and surrounding swaths of nature.

(Top Right) The spacious kitchen features an atrium skylight, an expansive food-preparation island, and an adjacent nook for casual dining.

(Right) The occupants of this guest bedroom enjoy a breathtaking view of the grounds and the waters of Long Island Sound.



ALL PHOTOS BY DANIEL MILSTEIN FOR SOTHEBY'S INTERNATIONAL REALTY

English Palaces

The Historic Royal Palaces have family fun for all ages

By Rachael Dymski



Built in the 1070s, the Tower of London has been a staple of the London skyline for nearly 1,000 years.

PHOTO BY RABBIT 75_IST/GETTY IMAGES

MY 4-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER sits on a stool, looking impossibly small in the backdrop of the enormous fireplace. She turns a long spindle as two plucked chickens roast slowly over the flames. Looking up, she smiles at me hesitantly.

“Mind you don’t let that go idle,” says the cook, dressed in a white period piece with a black cap. “We’ve got 300 people dining here today.” He winks at her, and she grins before returning to her very important job.

We’re standing in the kitchens of Hampton Court Palace, a sprawling compound once home to the larger-than-life King Henry VIII. Designed to be able to create 1,000 meals a day to feed Henry’s court and servants, the kitchens feel like a castle in and of themselves.

We’re in London for three days, at the tail end of a holiday to see family. As my husband and I are history buffs, we wanted to see as much as we could of the city’s wide and varied history. With three children aged 5 and under, we weren’t sure how to do that in a way that would keep the whole family entertained. Enter Historic Royal Palaces.

In their own words, Historic Royal Palaces are “a team of people who love and look after six of the most wonderful palaces in the world.” Historic palaces in their care include Hampton Court, Kensington Palace, and The Tower of London. We decided to take on one each day during our stay in London and hoped our children would be able to keep up.

The beauty of the Historic Royal Palaces is that they are truly living history, and keeping our kids entertained ended up being the last thing we needed to worry about. Everywhere we turned, it seemed, they were being invited to engage with history. Whether it was helping to cook in the Hampton Court kitchens, playing with Victorian-era doll houses in Kensington Palace, or having a conversation with the Yeoman Warders who guard the Tower of London, my kids weren’t just observing stories or the past—they were experiencing it for themselves.

Tower of London

The Tower of London is impressive from any angle. Looming on the side of the Thames River, the tower has been a staple of the London skyline for nearly 1,000 years. Built in the 1070s by William the Conqueror, the large stone tower still stands impressively as an iconic London landmark.

The tower has functioned over the centuries as a prison, a palace, and even a

Historic Royal Palaces has more than **80,000 members.**

LONDON



The Tower of London and Hampton Court Palace are 13 miles apart.

Legend has it, if the ravens ever leave the Tower of London, the Kingdom will fall.

A statue of Queen Victoria stands near Kensington Palace.



FROM TOP: THE EPOCH TIMES; AVIYA ARIKA/SHUTTERSTOCK



At over 500,000 square feet, the Hampton Court is one of the largest palaces in the world.

zoo for exotic animals such as bears, monkeys, and elephants given to the royal family as gifts. Perhaps most famously, the tower is known as the place where Anne Boleyn, the second wife of King Henry VIII, spent her last days before being beheaded.

Today, it guards the Crown Jewels. Every day, the Yeoman Warders perform centuries-old traditions, such as the Ceremony of the Keys. A Yeoman Warder tour is an excellent way to see the tower, especially with children in tow. The guides entertain and educate in equal measure, telling my children about the polar bear who caught fish from the Thames River and the seven ravens who guard the tower.

Hampton Court Palace

Located just outside the city in Richmond, Hampton Court took us nearly an hour to get to from Central London. The sheer size and impressive structure of the palace made it alone worth the trip. Hampton Court is like a city all of its own. At more than 500,000 square feet, the palace is one of the largest in the world. Our kids especially enjoyed visiting the Henry VIII wing of the palace, sitting in the throne chairs in the banqueting hall and playing with the interactive menu.

Outside, the palace boasts acres of gardens to explore. The gardens are designed like mazes, and each room seems to open up to another enchanted walled garden. For children, the Magic Garden offers hours of adventure, complete with a mythical beast, towers to besiege, and—of course—a dragon. The Tower of London and Hampton Court take about three hours to explore, or longer if you want to be more thorough.

Kensington Palace

We visited Kensington Palace on our last morning in London. We walked through Hyde Park, which is somehow lovely even in the rain, sharing the wet pathway with swans and geese. Shaking out our umbrellas, we were quickly swept away by Kensington's ornate decoration, beautiful staircases, and rich history.

Our children especially enjoyed the Victorian exhibit, which focuses on the childhood of Queen Victoria in Kensington Palace. We learned about her complicated relationship with her mother, her turbulent ascension to the throne, and how she filled the many hours of a childhood she often referred to as lonely.

The Historic Royal Palaces offer a gift to all their visitors in that they allow them to experience the past as it is. They are stunning, well-kept, interactive, and educational: a worthwhile endeavor for the whole family. ■

Rachael Dymski is a writer, author and mom to three wonderful kids. She lives on a flower farm with her family in Pennsylvania.



A Yeoman Warder of the Tower of London gives a historical talk to tourists.

If You Go

Memberships:

Under 5's are free, but for older children, it's definitely worth considering a family membership. We saved just by visiting two of the locations.

Arrive Early:

The Historic Royal Palaces are popular destinations. It's worth arriving early to avoid long lines.

Getting Around:

Hampton Court is about an hour outside of Central London. We used public transport, which ended up being half the fun for our kids!

Take Note: The gift shops and cafés at all of the HRP sites are exceptional.

FROM TOP: KIEV VICTOR / SHUTTERSTOCK; MARK ANTHONY RAY / SHUTTERSTOCK

TO AGE OR NOT TO AGE? A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO CELLARING BEER

'Aged like a fine beer' probably isn't a phrase that's going to catch on any time soon, but like wine, beer can benefit from some time in the cellar.

By Kevin Revolinski

BACK WHEN I WROTE Minnesota's Best Beer Guide, I received a limited-release Belgian-inspired beer directly from a brewer who explicitly cautioned me: "Do not drink this now. Give it at least a year." I gave it two.

I took it to a dinner I was having with friends, and before we opened it, I looked at some old online reviews, which can be about as ill-advised as "reading the comments." This was a top-notch brewer, and yet I came across a few grumbles from unimpressed drinkers.

Then, we opened the beer. The entire table praised it, with friends gushing that it was the best they had ever had.

I went back and looked at the dates of those reviews, and sure enough, some reviewers were drinking it before it had a chance to develop. That lesson has stuck with me ever since.

You don't need to be a serious beer nerd to give cellaring beer a try, and if you have the patience, it'll be worth it.

When Fresh Is Best

First of all, here's what not to keep too long in the fridge: any hop-forward beer. Hops diminish over time, and pretty quickly in some cases. Never judge a brewery by an IPA you discovered in the back of your fridge from last summer. It's been ruined by time.

Improper refrigeration or packaging can also hasten the beer's demise. When you see pyramids of cases on the floor at room temperature in the store, think twice about how well those hops are doing.

Hop-forward beers should always be enjoyed fresh.



Sour beers can be completely different a year later.



Dark bottles or aluminum cans are best; clear or green beer bottles offer no protection from merciless UV rays.



Generally speaking, the bigger the beer, the better it'll take to aging.



Let It Age

However, some beers either improve with age or change in a way that's interesting.

Generally speaking, the bigger the beer, the better. North of 8 percent ABV, imperial stouts often do well in the cellar, especially the barrel-aged variety. Higher alcohol content and sweetness make these brews amenable to resting; the booziness mellows and subtle flavors emerge.

Barley wine, a beer with a wine-like strength, is a cellar favorite. The big, malty profile grows more complex, and a storage period of four or five years is recommended.

Although often lower in alcohol, sour beers also can develop complexity over time. A year later, it can be a completely different beer. In fact, beers such as Belgian lambics are already aged in barrels with wild yeast

and bacteria before they're even bottled and sold. Fruited sours can also be aged, but you may find that the fruit fades and the funky notes take over.

Bottle-conditioned beers also age well. The yeast remains active, and as it continues to eat sugars, the flavor profile changes, becoming richer and stronger.

Some brewers age batches of their own beer and then bottle them for special occasions. These brews are sold ready for drinking but can still be cellared some more. For a true beer geek, it's a thrill to set up a vertical tasting and see how one batch compares to another.

But for now, stock your cellar and just sit back and wait for a special day. ■

Kevin Revolinski is an avid traveler, craft beer enthusiast, and home-cooking fan. He's based in Madison, Wis.

ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK

Starting a Vegetable Garden

With a little effort, anyone can learn how to grow, harvest their own vegetables

By Bill Lindsey



A home garden is a project the entire family can enjoy and take part in, while learning self-reliance skills.

IF YOU THINK THE ONLY PLACE to get vegetables is at the grocery store, prepare to be amazed and on the way to some degree of self-sufficiency.

In the wartime years of the 1940s, many people started “Victory Gardens” as a way to grow their own vegetables. The concept faded as grocery stores popped up all over the country, but it’s now making a comeback. Beyond fears of food shortages, there are other reasons to grow your own produce, including the ability to grow specific foods or varieties, eating food that’s “fresh off the vine” and free of pesticides, as well as the fact that while growing your own food requires a lot of preparation and maintenance, it can be economical over the long run when crops are coming in regularly.

The size of your crop will be determined by the amount of land available, but there are options for apartment dwellers as well as those in suburbia who can convert a lawn into a compact, productive farm.

First Things First

The first step is to decide what you want to grow, and to determine if it’s viable to grow it where you live. The best way to do this is to review

The best gardeners are those who learn, which requires time and commitments.

the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) plant hardiness zone map for where you live. Plants bought from a local nursery should do fine in your garden, but if you buy seeds, look at the back of the package or the USDA hardiness zone information to make sure they’re suitable for your area. As an example, while pineapples are best suited for southern sections of California and Florida, there are species of vegetables including lettuce, spinach, Swiss chard, tomatoes, and more that can be grown across the United States. Read all the information on the seed packet, as it may tell you when to expect to see sprouts, the best time of year to plant, and when to harvest.

The best gardeners are those who learn, which requires time and a commitment to constantly develop new skills and gather useful information from sources such as the [USDA.gov](https://www.usda.gov) website, any of the plethora of



Raised planter boxes provide a way to grow vegetables when open areas of land aren’t available.



When growing vegetables from seeds, review the USDA plant hardiness map to make sure they are viable in your geographic region.



Gardening requires specialized tools to plant, hoe, remove weeds, and water plants; choose quality tools that will provide many years of use.



Transplanting seedlings is a great way to expedite the garden’s harvest. Place them to ensure they aren’t overcrowded and can grow to full size.

Once a garden begins to produce a harvest, it becomes easier to keep it going, resulting in fresh vegetables for your enjoyment.



LEFT PAGE: PHOTO BY ELENA MEDOKS/SHUTTERSTOCK; THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM L: PIRANKA/GETTY IMAGES, PIVASET/SHUTTERSTOCK, ABRAMOVA ELENA/SHUTTERSTOCK, ALEXANDER RATHS/SHUTTERSTOCK, AFRICA STUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK



Repurposing a section of otherwise unused lawn for a home garden is an easy way to start producing crops.

gardening channels on YouTube, and the Farmers' Almanac, which, since 1818, has been delightfully guiding farmers on what crops to grow at various times of the year, as well as proving weather forecasts, farming tips, home remedies, recipes, stargazing schedules, and much more.

Plant Your Plot

Once you decide what to grow, it's time to decide the location and size of your "personal farm." Most apartment dwellers might not realize they can grow their own food, but through the use of indoor plants, windowsill planters, or systems such as Rise indoor hydroponic gardens, they, too, can grow and harvest vegetables, including peppers and herbs such as basil, mint, and thyme. A community garden is another option, but not one to be further explored here.

Unless you have a huge, sprawling yard, most first-time home gardeners may want to start small, either using raised planter boxes and pots or by designating a 25-square-foot section of yard for growing vegetables. A smaller plot requires less time to manage, making you more likely to stick with it and allowing you to learn as you go. As you plan the

garden, consider the mature sizes of your crops to avoid planting seeds or plants too closely, leading to overcrowding.

The next step is to determine the soil quality. For planter boxes or pots, use soil from the local garden center, but when repurposing a section of the yard, look at the soil. If it's mostly rich and loamy and has the right pH levels, you are ready to start planting. However, if it's rocky, sandy, or thick clay, you may need to amend it with compost, or bring in soil by the bag—or by the truckload.

Gardening requires the right tools, including a shovel, spade, hoes for weeding and soil-turning, a trowel, a water hose with a wand or spray nozzle, pruners, gloves, and a rain gauge. It's actually more economical to buy the best quality tools that will last for many years, so you don't have to replace them frequently.

With the seeds or young plants in the ground, the focus turns to maintaining the garden, keeping it free of weeds and properly watered. Indoor gardeners need to ensure that their crops receive the proper amount of sunlight for optimal growth. Keep an eye on the plants, harvest the bounty, and keep the process going. ■

E
LIFESTYLE
GROW YOUR OWN

Home-Grown Food 101



Decide What You Want

Consider vegetables and herbs that are well-suited to your geographic region, referring to the USDA plant hardiness map.



Start Small

Planter boxes, large pots, indoor hydroponic gardens, or a small outdoor plot will allow you to learn as you grow, with a minimal investment of time to see if it suits you.



Do It Right the 1st Time

Check the soil to make sure it supports good plant growth, bringing in "good" soil if necessary. Commit to a schedule of weeding, watering, and otherwise maintaining the plants in order to ensure a successful harvest.

THIS PAGE FROM L. CASARSAGURU/GETTY IMAGES; THE EPOCH TIMES

MOTORSPORT-ORIENTED WRIST WATCHES

Whether used by a race driver or sported by a fan on the sidelines, chronographs are the watch of choice for anyone who loves tracking speed

By Bill Lindsey



Reversible Racer REC TTT ICON1000

\$1,046
Motorsports accessory manufacturers ICON1000 and REC created this innovative driver's watch. Held in place by a leather strap resembling a motorcycle saddle, it can be worn with the dial facing up, or the housing can be reversed for a clear view of the automatic mechanism in motion. Limited to 1,000 pieces, this is a reasonably priced, very functional collectible.



A Wrist-Worn Stopwatch BREITLING TOP TIME DEUS

\$5,500
Breitling and Australian motorcycle customizer Deus Ex Machina updated the 1960s-era Top Time, resulting in a simple, yet very practical driver's chronograph. The 41 mm housing protects an in-house automatic movement driving the hour, minute, and second hands, and two subdials. "In Benzin Veritas" (In Gasoline There Is Truth) inscribed on the tachymeter outer band underscores the motorsports nature of this timepiece.



Sleek Style YEMA MEANGRAF SUPER Y70

\$399
Yema's Meangraf is a modern take on traditional racing chronographs. The rotating tachymetric bezel is uniquely inset into the case featuring a domed, 1970s-style mineral crystal. Beneath the dial with three subdials and an elongated, all-orange sweep second hand resides a modern Seiko VK64 automatic quartz movement to ensure precise timekeeping ability. Another notable feature is the flexible polished stainless-steel bracelet.



Newman's Choice ROLEX COSMOGRAPH DAYTONA

\$14,800
Wearing it as he drove race cars, actor Paul Newman made the Daytona the ultimate driver's watch. Launched in 1963, the now-iconic design features a 40 mm case accented by a tachymetric scale used to measure vehicle speed. The dial features three subdials to track hours, minutes, and seconds, activated by the pushers that bracket the winding stem.

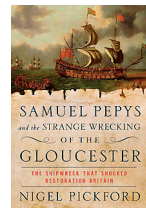


An Updated Classic STRATON SPECIALE

\$499
This retro-styled chronograph pays homage to auto racing via its iconic Gulf Racing orange-and-blue accents. The blue dial is bordered by a tachymetric scale on the outer edge, with a high-visibility orange sweep second hand. Two mechanical movements are available; a Seiko quartz VK67 or a Swiss Valjoux driving a day/date window. A supple leather strap keeps it in place.

RECOMMENDED READING

This week, we feature a new biography of a nearly forgotten Civil War general and absorbing history of a shipwreck that stunned Britain.



HISTORY

'Samuel Pepys and the Strange Wrecking of the Gloucester'

By Nigel Pickford

It's 1682 in Restoration Britain. Charles II is ailing and invites his younger brother, James, Duke of York, to return from exile and prepare to take his rightful place as heir to the throne. The future king sets sail with a fleet of ships for Edinburgh. However, disaster strikes when his ship, the Gloucester, sinks along the Norfolk Coast. He is spared, but hundreds die in the calamity. Conspiracies abound about this frigate's fateful passing. Diarist Samuel Pepys plays a role in the retelling.

PEGASUS BOOKS, 2023, 304 PAGES



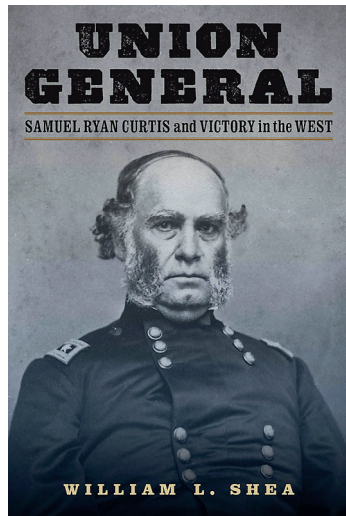
COMMENTARY

'Wind Sprints'
By Joseph Epstein

Long known as one of our finest

living essayists, this collection of 143 pieces, what Epstein calls casuals, offers brief, pungent, and spot-on thoughts on contemporary culture and society. Titles like "Khaki-Pantsman," "The Attack on the Hot Dog," and "Spandexless" reveal the writer's wit and the breadth of topics he covers. On subjects as varied as death and love, literature and film, and food and exercise, Epstein delivers insights and wisdom, all accompanied by a good dose of wry humor.

AXIOS PRESS, 2016, 608 PAGES

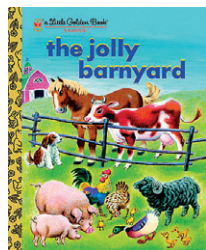


BIOGRAPHY

'Union General'
By William L. Shea

Samuel Ryan Curtis was one of the North's most successful generals. He never lost a battle and was the victor at several key battles, including Pea Ridge. Late in the Civil War, he commanded Union forces in the Trans-Mississippi, managing to negotiate peace with the Sioux. He was a nationally known civil engineer, and he helped found the Republican Party. As the first biography of Curtis, it thoroughly examines the nearly forgotten Union general—his political, engineering, and military feats.

POTOMAC BOOKS, 2023, 368 PAGES

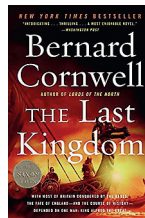


FOR KIDS

'The Jolly Barnyard'
By Annie North Bedford

This classic is a celebration of kindness and generosity. While the farm animals banter about what to give the farmer for his birthday, the farmer celebrates by offering them their favorite treats. From horses to cows to chickens and more, each gets what it likes best. When the farmer returns home, he finds a special birthday treat awaits him.

GOLDEN BOOKS, 2004, 24 PAGES



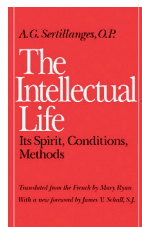
FICTION

'The Last Kingdom'
By Bernard Cornwell

It's the first book of

Cornwell's medieval saga. The year is A.D. 866, and the Danes are rampaging through England, conquering town after town and humbling king after king. The narrator is the captured boy of English royalty who quickly gravitates to the ways of his captors, the Vikings. As his new friends march toward complete domination of England, he's caught between loyalties. Cornwell captures the essence of the Vikings' brutality and their endearing qualities. A fascinating and fun read.

HARPERCOLLINS, 2006, 368 PAGES



CLASSICS

'The Intellectual Life'
By A.G. Sertillanges, O.P., Mary Ryan (translator)

First published in 1920, this guide to thinking, study, and work has proven an invaluable resource to generations of students, professors, and writers. Sertillanges offers many practical, concrete recommendations for a satisfying scholarly life while never forgetting to point to its noble ideals. One remark near the book's end serves as its heart: "The reward of a work is to have produced it; the reward of effort is to have grown by it."

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA PRESS REPRINT, 1992, 264 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 new comedy about a grumpy coach and his unique team and a stylized crime thriller about G-men taking down the mob.

NEW RELEASE



'Champions' (2023)

▶ Marcus (Woody Harrelson) is a bitter minor-league basketball coach who lands in court after some bad decisions. Although initially upset when he's court-ordered to do community service—coaching youngsters with intellectual disabilities—there may just be a silver lining after all.

Although this sports movie has some hilarious comic scenes and light drama, it also has some tender moments that reflect more serious issues. It features a cast of wonderful performers with intellectual disabilities who lend to its authenticity.

COMEDY | DRAMA | SPORT

Release Date:
March 10, 2023

Director:
Bobby Farrelly

Starring:
Woody Harrelson, Kaitlin Olson, Matt Cook

Running Time:
2 hours, 3 minutes

MPAA Rating:
PG-13

Where to Watch:
Theaters

★★★★★

A DELIGHTFUL COMEDY



'The Kid From Brooklyn' (1946)

▶ When meek milkman Burleigh Sullivan (Danny Kaye) knocks out high-ranking boxer Speed McFarlane,

who was messing with his sister, he tries his hand at pro-boxing in order to impress the lovely Polly Pringle (Virginia Mayo).

This comedy is full of silly slap-

stick antics by the always-physical comedian Danny Kaye. He's truly at the top of his game in this spirited '40s movie.

COMEDY | SPORT

Release Date:
March 21, 1946

Director:
Norman Z. McLeod

Starring:
Danny Kaye, Virginia Mayo, Vera-Ellen

Running Time:
1 hour, 53 minutes

Not Rated

Where to Watch:
Plex, Kanopy, Tubi

★★★★★

FAMILY PICK

'Inside Out' (2015)

▶ In this thought-provoking computer-animated film by Pixar Animation Studios, an 11-year-old girl named Riley (Kaitlyn Dias) moves with her family from their hometown in the Midwest to San Francisco. She must contend with a wide array of emotions—actual internal characters—as she transitions to her new home.

This comedy sports some imaginative visuals with lush colors and fluid animation. It has an interesting story and a lot of hilarious



situations that never feel contrived. This emotional adventure is recommended for all ages.

ANIMATION | ADVENTURE | COMEDY

Release Date:
June 19, 2015

Directors:
Pete Docter, Ronnie Del Carmen (co-director)

Starring:
Amy Poehler (voice), Bill Hader (voice), Lewis Black (voice)

Running Time:
1 hour, 35 minutes

MPAA Rating: PG

Where to Watch:
Apple TV, Redbox, Vudu

★★★★★

A SENSATIONAL CRIME THRILLER

'The Untouchables' (1987)

▶ In the turbulent world of Prohibition-era Chicago, crime boss Al Capone (Robert De Niro) holds the city in his malevolent grip. However, Capone meets resistance when federal agent Eliot Ness (Kevin Costner) forms a small, elite squad of incorruptible G-Men to wage all-out war on the crime lord.

This is a stylized cinematic rendition of real-life characters and events that features outstanding cinematography and an im-



mensive soundtrack. Just be aware that the film is studded with gangland violence.

CRIME | DRAMA | THRILLER

Release Date:
June 3, 1987

Director:
Brian De Palma

Starring:
Kevin Costner, Sean Connery, Robert De Niro

Running Time:
1 hour, 59 minutes

MPAA Rating: R

Where to Watch:
DirecTV, Vudu, Redbox

★★★★★



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—Paul Behrends, consultant

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“★★★★★

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—Richard Connema, Broadway critic

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—Edward McMillan-Scott, former Vice-President of the European Parliament

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—Donna Karan, creator of DKNY

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Well-Mannered Dogs

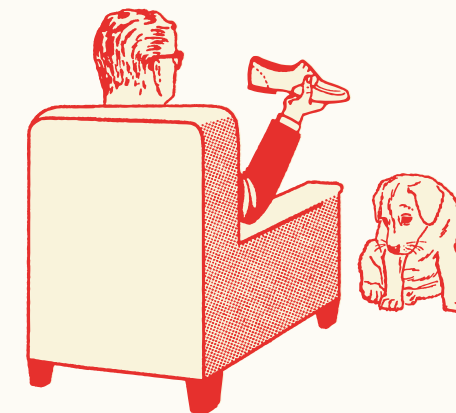
How to make your pooch welcome everywhere

Dogs are indeed our best friends, so they want to come along when we go to the mall, the grocery store, or to work. As long as they—and we—adhere to basic manners, they’ll generate lots of smiles and make new friends.

By Bill Lindsey

1 Strolling Spaniels

In many areas, it has become common to see dogs in retail stores, shopping malls, and even grocery stores. Most shoppers don’t get upset at the sight of small dogs in a pet stroller, but not everyone is happy to see them in a shopping cart or have a big dog such as a German shepherd in the store. It’s important that your pup stays right beside you and doesn’t bark at shoppers or any other dogs you may encounter.



5 Wonderful Walkies

Most dogs love meeting new people and other dogs while out for a walk around the neighborhood, but stay on the sidewalk and use a leash and harness to keep yours safe from passing cars and bicycles. After dark, carry a flashlight to make it easy for cars, bicycle riders, and other walkers to see you. If your dog is easily excited, keep it close to you to avoid scaring passersby or lunging at other dogs it wants to meet.

2 Working Woofers

If your workplace is pet-friendly and your pup is well-behaved around strangers, consider bringing it along. If you have an office, use a dog gate to keep Fido from wandering into meetings, getting rambunctious with the other dogs, or upsetting co-workers who may not be comfortable around dogs. Your co-workers aren’t pet sitters, so walking it is your job, as is cleaning up any “accidents.” Keep him or her comfortable by bringing a bed, a water bowl, toys, and snacks.

3 Dining With Dachshunds

Some restaurants allow pets in outdoor dining sections, or in the restaurant itself if they’re service dogs. To make sure you and the other diners have an enjoyable meal, keep your dog sitting or lying down quietly at your feet, out of sight as much as possible. Resist the urge to sneak snacks to that happy snout, as that could cause the pup to become overexcited and upset other diners.

4 Visiting Friends

If your friends like your dog as much as they like you, keep it that way by making sure your pup stays off their furniture, doesn’t steal their dog’s toys or food, doesn’t beg for your food, doesn’t dig holes in their garden, and lets you know when it needs to be taken outside for a walk. If your friends have kids who want to play with your pup, keep an eye out to make sure everybody plays nicely and gently.

CSA IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

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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