



EPOCH INSIGHT

AI-Powered Robots

LIMITATIONS AND POSSIBILITIES

By Petr Svab

11>



WEEK 11, 2023

AI-Powered Robots: What Can We Expect?

WE MAY WANT TO IGNORE ADVANCES in artificial intelligence (AI) and robots, but it seems they're here to stay and already in our lives.

While both AI and robots have advanced spectacularly, they're still sorely lacking in the versatility and adaptiveness that allow the human mind and body to function smoothly in our world.

In this week's Epoch Insight, reporter Petr Svab talks to experts who are skeptical about the realization of not only a general-purpose robot, but even a truly autonomous car.

"People's appetite for autonomous vehicles is hinged on the idea that they're perfect, not on the idea that they're as bad as humans," says Illah Nourbakhsh, professor of ethics and computational technologies at Carnegie Mellon University's Robotics Institute.

A professor of robotics at the University of Michigan outlines his concern about the technology's potential for weaponization.

"I can't imagine anything really cool that we could develop that could help us in our homes, in our factories ... that could not just be turned into a weapon," Jessy Grizzle says.

Read this week's cover story to learn more about the current state of AI technology, the ethical implications, and the hopes and fears of developers.



ON THE COVER

AI-powered robots are still limited, but their capabilities open up exciting, scary possibilities for the future.

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A VIEW OF CLOUDS HOVERING
over the skyline of Kuwait City at
sunset on March 15.

PHOTO BY YASSER AL-ZAYYAT/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



The Week



A Silicon Valley Bank office in Tempe, Ariz., on March 14.

PHOTO BY REBECCA NOBLE/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

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INSIDE

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“The system is breaking down, and we absolutely have a major problem in our economy today.”

Carl Icahn, billionaire financier, on the current condition of the U.S. economy, on CNBC’s “Closing Bell”



0.1%

The **Producer Price Index**, which reflects price charges among **manufacturers, farmers, and wholesalers**, fell by 0.1 percent in February after rising by a downwardly revised 0.3 percent in January, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

“It is not ‘sinful’ to prohibit the mutilation of minors.”



Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, responding to President Joe Biden’s comments criticizing the state’s efforts to protect children from gender-transition surgery as “close to sinful” and “cruel.”

\$1 BILLION

U.S. prosecutors have arrested exiled Chinese businessman Guo Wengui, accusing him of orchestrating a scheme to defraud his online followers of more than \$1 billion.

\$73 MILLION

The Biden administration says it will release **\$73 million in grants to help more Americans save on monthly internet costs** through the Affordable Connectivity Program.



17 MEMBERS

At least 17 House members and hundreds of congressional staffers were affected by the DC Health Link data breach that was first reported on March 8, a spokesperson for the House Committee on House Administration said.

THIS PAGE FROM TOP: MAT SZWABKOS/GETTY IMAGES; CHENEY ORG/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES; SHUTTERSTOCK; RIGHT PAGE: ANDREW CABALLERO-REYNOLDS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

VACCINES

FDA Authorizes Updated COVID-19 Vaccine for Children as Young as 6 Months

THE FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION has granted emergency authorization to the updated Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine as a booster for children as young as 6 months old, even though Pfizer has produced no clinical efficacy data for any age group.

FDA officials said the emergency clearance was based on trial data that showed 60 children had “an immune response” after receiving the updated bivalent booster, and trial data that found 60 young children experienced side effects such as fatigue, diarrhea, and vomiting after bivalent vaccination.

The authorization means children aged 6 months to 5 years will be encouraged to get a booster dose just two months after the final dose of a three-dose Pfizer primary series.



A customer looks at guns in EJB’s Gun Shop in Capitol Heights, Md., on March 14.

GUN CONTROL

Gun Rights Group Responds to Biden’s New Executive Order

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN has signed an executive order designed to advance his gun-control agenda after his repeated calls for a ban on so-called assault weapons and high-capacity magazines.

Second Amendment advocates responded quickly to Biden’s action. “Crimes are committed by criminals. Until President Biden and his allies decide to go after violent criminals, violence will continue to spiral out of control as it has. The focus of our laws and efforts should be on the criminal element and not on law-abiding Americans,” a statement from the National Rifle Association reads.

Biden’s order will require background checks on more than just retail firearms sales, promote the adoption and use of “Red Flag Laws,” make gun dealer inspection reports public, call for stricter enforcement of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, and request that the Federal Trade Commission issue a report on the marketing of firearms to children by gun makers.

COVID-19 ORIGIN

FBI, State Department Miss Deadline to Produce COVID-19 Origin Information

THE FBI AND THE STATE DEPARTMENT didn’t provide documents by the deadline in response to a congressional request for information on the origins of the COVID-19 virus, according to a House panel.

The information was requested on Feb. 27 by Rep. James Comer (R-Ky), chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Accountability, and by Rep. Brad R. Wenstrup (R-Ohio), chairman of the House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic. The deadline for providing the documents was March 13.

“We have not received documents at this time, but we are in communication with the agencies about the chairman’s request, and we expect compliance,” a spokesperson for the subcommittee told The Epoch Times on March 13.

HEALTH

Feds Propose Rules to Crack Down on ‘Forever Chemicals’ in Drinking Water

THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION has proposed a new set of nationwide standards for drinking water, seeking to limit the levels of certain fluorinated chemicals associated with cancer that can build up in the human body over time.

The draft regulation, published by the Environmental Protection Agency, targets six chemicals known by the abbreviations PFOA, PFOS, PFNA, PFBS, PFHxS, and GenX. They have been found in drinking water supplies across the nation.

These chemicals are among the thousands of types of PFAS, a broad class of artificial compounds often referred to as “forever chemicals” because it takes an extremely long time for them to break down in the environment. Some of them never fully break down.



U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley (L), U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin (C), and U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Celeste Wallander attend a virtual meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, at the Pentagon on March 15.

US-RUSSIA

Russian Jet’s Collision With US Drone Part of ‘Pattern of Aggressive’ Actions: Austin

U.S. SECRETARY OF DEFENSE Lloyd Austin called Russia’s aggression toward a U.S. drone “reckless,” in a meeting with the Ukraine Defense Contact Group.

Austin told the group that two Russian aircraft engaged in “dangerous, reckless, and unprofessional practices” over the Black Sea on March 14 when they dumped fuel on an unmanned U.S. MQ-9 aircraft that was conducting routine operations in international airspace.

One jet also “intercepted and hit our MQ-9 aircraft, resulting in a crash,” in what he called a “hazardous episode” that “is part of a pattern of aggressive, risky, and unsafe actions by Russian pilots in international airspace.”

He said that attacks on U.S. aircraft wouldn’t deter American forces. “So make no mistake: The United States will continue to fly and to operate wherever international law allows,” he said.

SOUTH AMERICA

Argentina’s Inflation Tops 100 Percent in February

ARGENTINA’S ANNUAL INFLATION has exceeded 100 percent for the first time in three decades, with the country’s citizens finding it difficult to make ends meet.

Twelve-month inflation for February came in at 102.5 percent, according to data from the country’s statistics agency. That essentially means that the price of goods has more than doubled in the past year, and it’s the first time since a period of hyperinflation in 1991 that Argentina’s annual inflation has hit triple figures. On a monthly basis, inflation rose by 6.6 percent from January. Year-to-date inflation was 13.1 percent.

TECH

Samsung to Invest \$300 Billion in Construction of South Korean Chip Center

SAMSUNG ELECTRONICS will invest 300 trillion won (\$227 billion) over the next 20 years to build five new chip plants in South Korea as part of the government’s goal to establish “the world’s largest” chip center by 2042.

The plans were announced by the South Korean Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Energy. The ministry said the chip center would be established in Gyeonggi Province and attract 150 materials, components, and fabless companies (which include design and sales but outsource manufacturing).



Samsung Electronics’ chip production plant in Pyeongtaek, South Korea, on Sept. 7, 2022.

AFRICA

Malawi, Mozambique Race to Rescue Survivors After Cyclone

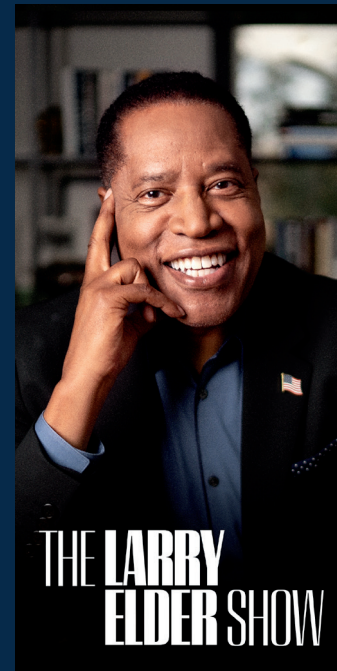
MALAWI AND MOZAMBIQUE have reported almost 380 deaths from Tropical Cyclone Freddy, one of the most powerful and longest-lasting cyclones ever recorded in the Southern Hemisphere.

Freddy tore through southern Africa for the second time over the weekend of March 11, after first making landfall in late February.

It caused mass devastation in several regions, including Malawi’s second-largest city, Blantyre, before dissipating midweek. Some 200 remained missing in the country as Malawian President Lazarus Chakwera declared a 14-day national mourning period on March 16.

In neighboring Mozambique, at least 53 have been killed, with 50,000 more still displaced.

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The Week in Photos



1.

1. Best in show winner Orca, a Lagotto Romagnolo, with handler Javier Gonzalez Mendikote at the international Crufts dog show in Birmingham, England, on March 12.

2. Afghan boys look out from a window of their house in Yaftali Sufla district on March 12.

3. A participant falls into the Yarra River from his homemade flying device during the annual Birdman Rally at the Moomba Festival in Melbourne, Australia, on March 12.

4. Anti-riot police face off with fans of the Eintracht Frankfurt soccer club (background) in downtown Naples, Italy, prior to the UEFA Champions League match between SSC Napoli and Eintracht Frankfurt, on March 15.

5. Thick smoke rises during an eruption from Mount Merapi, Indonesia's most active volcano, as seen from Tunggularum village on March 11.



2.



3.



4.

5.

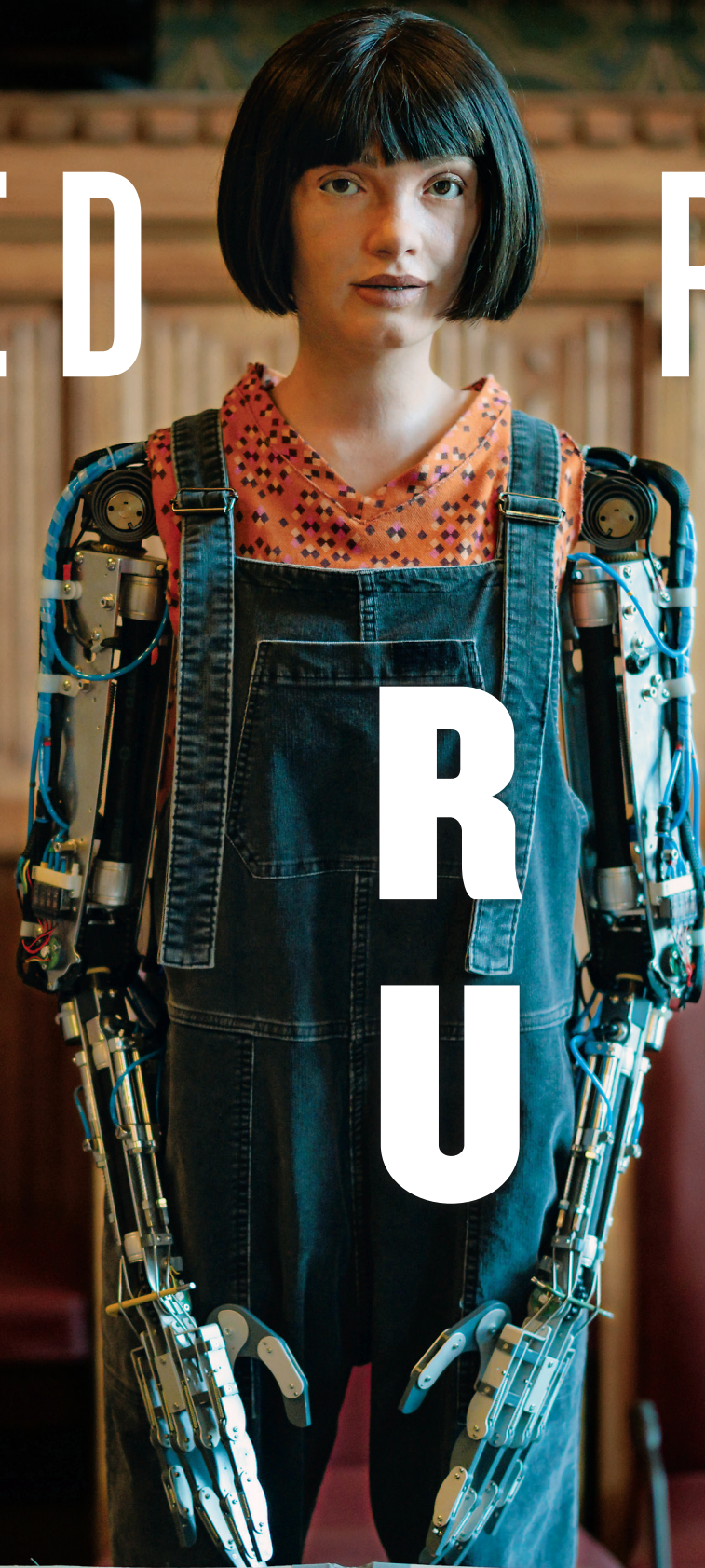


COUNTERTOP/LOOKWISE FROM TOP; OLI SCARF/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES; ONEARBA/RAFP VIA GETTY IMAGES; WILLIAM WEST/APP VIA GETTY IMAGES; G. ROFUSCO/ANSA/APP VIA GETTY IMAGES; DEVI HANAW/APP VIA GETTY IMAGES.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

AI-POWERED ROBOTS OPEN EXCITING, SCARY FUTURE

Still limited in capability, AI has ample potential for both riveting advances and misuse



BY PETR SVAB

Ai-Da Robot, the world's first ultra-realistic humanoid robot artist, appears at a photo call in a committee room in the House of Lords in London on Oct. 11, 2022.

PHOTO BY ROB PINNEY/GETTY IMAGES

WHILE INTELLIGENT ROBOTS aren't likely to take over the world anytime soon, they could change key domains of modern civilization, boosting economic efficiency and day-to-day convenience while unleashing ample potential for misuse, according to several experts.

In recent years, the world has been rocked by riveting advances in artificial intelligence and robotics, from ChatGPT composing poetry and autonomous Waymo cabs traversing San Francisco to Boston Dynamics' humanoid robot Atlas performing acrobatics.

On a more sinister note, the war in Ukraine has previewed some of the lethal potential of unmanned vehicles.

Such advances may conjure a notion that humanity is on the cusp of creating a robot that could compete with humans in real-time agility and intelligence. Yet that expectation is unrealistic, several AI and robotics experts have told The Epoch Times.

While both AI and robots have advanced so spectacularly that they match or surpass an average human in many ways, they're still sorely lacking in the versatility and adaptiveness that allow the human mind and body to function smoothly in our world.

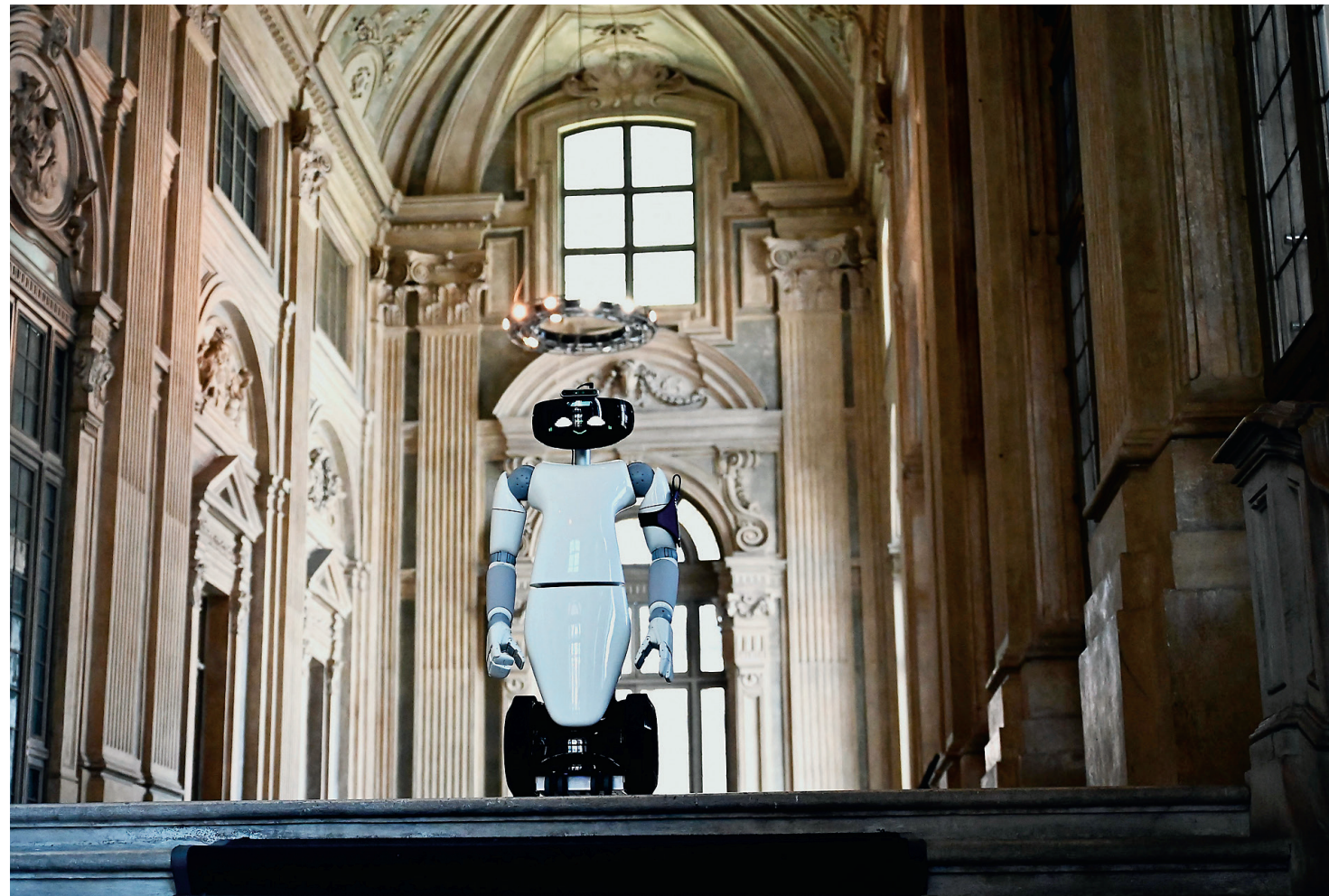
The core problem is that there are just too many "unknown unknowns," according to Lionel Robert, a robotics professor at the University of Michigan.

An AI that powers a robot or an autonomous vehicle owes its effectiveness to the data used to "train" it. If it hasn't encountered a situation before, it won't know how to handle it, Robert explained.

An example could be a robot learning to open a door. With sufficient training data, the AI could learn to recognize doors of different shapes, sizes, and colors—with different frames and door handles, from different angles and under different lighting conditions—and how to execute the door opening maneuver from different approach angles.

But what if the door were blocked by a box? The robot would have no concept of what a blocked door was. It might not even recognize it as a door anymore. It would need another large tranche of training data on recognizing a door blocked by a box—different doors, different boxes, different angles, and lighting conditions. Then, it would need to be programmed to perform maneuvers to remove boxes of various sizes and weights. Only then could it proceed with opening the door. But what if a dolly blocked the door? Or a chair? The complexity appears infinite.

"We respond to unexpected situations that we've never encountered before by being innovative. But these systems, by definition, aren't innovative; they need to have seen the same situation



(Top) The humanoid robot R1 serves as a virtual guide for visitors at the Palazzo Madama museum in Turin, Italy, on May 12, 2021.

(Above) A bus leaves its stop on South Korea's first self-driving bus route run by 42 Dot, a start-up owned by South Korea's Hyundai, in Seoul on Nov. 23, 2022.

FROM TOP: MARCO BERTOLLO/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES; ANTHONY WALLACE/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

it achieves an accuracy of, let's say, 90 percent ... they assume, 'OK, it took me nine hours to do this, it's probably only one or two more hours to get to a 100 percent,'" he said.

"And the problem is, any machine that has sensors and actuators and connects to the complex world we're in, every additional increment of reliability you need, getting from 90 percent to 95, to 99 percent, is exponentially harder."

The reliability of a self-driving car, in practice, has to be much higher than 99 percent. The AI has to make hundreds of decisions every day, and one day there are supposed to be millions, even hundreds of millions, of autonomous vehicles on the road.

"There are situations that happen once in a million times, there are trillions of such situations that exist. You can't test them all, but they still happen," Nourbakhsh said.

Vasudevan concurred.

"That number is still so large that it is prohibitive from a risk perspective for us to actually deploy these vehicles in a fully autonomous fashion," he said.

AI lacks the versatility and adaptiveness that allow the human mind and body to function smoothly. If AI hasn't encountered a situation before, it won't know how to handle it, a professor says.

Moreover, if a deficiency is discovered, it can be exceedingly difficult to fix.

"You introduce a fix to get it from 95 to 96 and then what happens is you go down to 91 because the side effect of your fix is you just broke something else that was really fragile—it's a house of cards," Nourbakhsh said.

Even worse, knowing that you've broken something can sometimes be impossible. "If it's a one-in-a-billion thing, you can't generate all those tests in the real world," he said.

There's actually quite a bit of subtlety to driving, autonomous car developers have discovered.

"Engineers thought this was a pretty easy problem because driving was pretty codified, right?" Robert said.

"There are rules—there's a red light, there's a green light, turn left, turn right—that's a pretty algorithmic problem on paper. Well, it turns out that driving is very much a social activity."

Especially in a city, drivers and pedestrians gesture and sometimes yell at each other to not only communicate what they're going to do, but also how they feel. Their behavior and driving style gives cues to others on what they want to do. ♦♦

before and then respond similarly," said Illah Nourbakhsh, professor of ethics and computational technologies at Carnegie Mellon University's Robotics Institute.

For this reason, the experts were skeptical about the realization of not only a general-purpose robot, but even a truly autonomous car.

Sort of Self-Driving

Car companies have long been promising that self-driving cars are just beyond the horizon. Yet, despite a handful of pilot programs, a car that could reliably drive itself anywhere and everywhere remains elusive.

"It's been pretty depressing waiting because I think people overpromised and really underdelivered," said Ram Vasudevan, associate professor of mechanical engineering at the University of Michigan.

"I don't actually think that these systems are really close to being deployed in a really effective way."

The reason for this overpromise "has to do with complex systems theory," according to Nourbakhsh. "When people make any complex machine and



A service robot on display during Japan Robot Week 2022 in Tokyo on Oct. 19, 2022.

A driverless car lacks that ability, introducing uncertainty and confusion.

“There’s just a lot of implicit and explicit communication and coordination that goes on that is just not easy to hardwire into an algorithm,” Robert said, noting that “this problem so far lacks a definitive solution.”

“How do you teach a vehicle to be social? And even then, how do you teach it to be social in different contexts? The vehicle picks you up in Ann Arbor downtown then takes you to Detroit downtown—that’s a different context,” he said.

Requiring the car to handle all such complexities also makes it less “green” because all the requisite computing power consumes a lot of energy, he noted.

There are also some technical limitations. Autonomous cars scan their environment with “lidars”—sensors that use lasers to measure the distance of other objects. So far, lidars have trouble with inclement weather because they sometimes interpret raindrops or snowflakes as obstacles.

The issue is not just whether it’s possible to deploy autonomous cars, but also whether it makes financial sense to do so, Vasudevan pointed out. So far, companies like Waymo need to have crews on standby to quickly come and fix issues and finish deliveries in cases where the self-driving cabs get stuck or run into other trouble. This human backup makes the system too expensive, he argued.

Even if the current AI improves by an order of magnitude, failures would still be too frequent to put profitability within reach, he opined. “I don’t

think there’s a straight-line path to that point in the next several years.”

One obstacle is that people have particularly high safety expectations for self-driving cars, according to Jessy Grizzle, professor of robotics at the University of Michigan.

“Even if the cars drive as safely as the humans, we’re still going to blame them much more for the accidents,” he said.

Moreover, the blame for accidents likely wouldn’t fall on the car owner, as it usually does today, but on the AI manufacturer or operator, who would then face the liability.

A robot would need to have reasoning ability combined with learning ability in order to actually ‘think,’ an expert says.

“People’s appetite for autonomous vehicles is hinged on the idea that they’re perfect, not on the idea that they’re as bad as humans,” Nourbakhsh said.

Grizzle opined that autonomous vehicles “could become actionable and profitable” if they could operate in an environment that doesn’t require stringent safety standards and other regulations, such as those imposed by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Early 20th-century carmakers, for example, owed much of their success to the regulation-free

environment as well as ignorance regarding the harmful effects of their products, he argued.

“If they had had to build the cars and meet EPA requirements because they actually understood health and they had to have the same reliability in terms of safety, they never would have gotten off the ground either,” he said.

The most practical solution, the experts noted, would be to limit the complexity of the environment.

“It’s easier to imagine an 18-wheeler driving 100 miles on an interstate from warehouse to warehouse, even 200 miles, as opposed to an autonomous cab driving five blocks in New York City. That’s a much harder thing to do,” Robert said.

Autonomous vehicles can also work in geofenced environments, such as malls, resorts, or senior home campuses.

Such a service, however, seems hardly any better than hopping on a bus.

“People want point-to-point pickup,” Robert noted.

One solution would be to design roadways, or even a whole city, with robotic cars in mind, giving them separate lanes, for example, isolated from pedestrians and other traffic.

“They can remove a lot of the hazards by the design of the environment instead of putting all of the smarts into the car,” Grizzle said.

Michigan, for instance, is introducing a separate interstate lane for self-driving cars. That dramatically simplifies the task “because autonomous vehicles can communicate with each other,” Robert said.

Traffic lights can also be upgraded to communicate with self-driving cars to give them a heads-up about an upcoming red light.

The current AI should be more than enough to handle such a scenario.

“It’s not going to justify the complexity that we’re putting into the typical vehicle that Waymo is deploying,” Grizzle said.

A step further would be to hook the cars into a centralized system.

“Imagine a society where the driving isn’t done by the vehicle, it’s done by a higher-level, citywide routing system,” Robert said.



A receptionist robot named Shiorin works during Japan Robot Week 2022 in Tokyo on Oct. 19, 2022.

“In that reality, there would be no red lights, no stop signs, the vehicles would never stop, they would coordinate as they pass each other in perfect harmony.”

That could be achievable in 20 years, he said. But in this case, the obstacle isn’t so much technological as social, he opined, as it would require people to submit to such a scheme.

“If you’ve got 100 vehicles and 99 are autonomous and one is human, that changes things, that makes it difficult,” he said.

Robots Among Us

Even if self-driving cars don’t live up to their hype, there’s a plethora of products where AI can perform impressive feats in the real world. Various AI-powered robots have been deployed as security guards, hospital and school staff, and home helpers.

Still, the development of a universal robot that could handle a wide range of real-world movement, tasks, and interactions remains even more problematic than autonomous cars—especially if the robot is humanoid.

On the mechanical side, humanoid robots are already quite sophisticated, as demonstrated by the Boston Dynamics creations. They can walk on different surfaces and terrains and even regain their stability when tripped or pushed. They can also scan and “see” their environment with a level of detail approaching that of self-driving cars.

But that’s still far cry from being ready for deployment in an uncontrolled environment, even one as limited as one’s home, according to the experts.

The Boston Dynamics demonstrations, for example, still rely on a fixed environment and choreographed routine.

“It’s as rigidly organized as if you were doing a gymnastics competition,” Grizzle said.

Part of the problem is the lack of training data. The available robots are still quite expensive and are usually custom-made for research institutions. Even if the body of training data were shared, it would still be minuscule compared to that available for self-driving cars.

“The ability to collect a sufficient amount of training data is one aspect,” said Maxim Likhachev, associate professor at Carnegie Mellon University’s Robotics Institute.

“But on its own, it’s not enough. There are some questions on the algorithmic level. How do you have this learning ability combine with the underlying reasoning ability, the ability to think—not just learn, but to actually think?”



“[AI systems] aren’t innovative; they need to have seen the same situation before and then respond similarly.”

Illah Nourbakhsh, professor, Robotics Institute, Carnegie Mellon University

The robot needs to have some level of deliberative reasoning that allows it to think situations through and understand why they are the way they are, so that it can then come up with a sequence of actions, he said.

Just like in the example of a door blocked by a box, the robot needs to understand what a blocked door means and devise a set of steps to resolve the problem.

There are some indications that an AI device is capable of some improvised reasoning and problem-solving. The ChatGPT language processor, for example, can produce a natural-sounding response to questions it hasn't encountered before.

It's folly to think, however, that sticking a ChatGPT into a robot would allow it to solve problems in the physical world, the experts pointed out.

For one thing, it's still far from infallible.

ChatGPT users have shown countless examples of the bot providing substandard, poorly sourced, misleading, or even false responses.

"If you or I were going through it as a copy editor and really checking the sources of all of the claims that are being made, we would find lots of mistakes," Grizzle said.

"Now if those same mistakes are made in physical actions, it usually results in something getting broken."

Some mistakes in AI word and image processing tend to be interpreted as creativity—an amusing quirk. It's unlikely, however, to be a desirable trait in robots that are meant to be useful in a practical sense, Vasudevan pointed out.

"Creative license in robotics tends to be an unforgiving thing," he said.

Paradoxically, the more useful the robot is, in terms of strength and speed, the more catastrophic the errors it can make.

"You build a really powerful robot, you build a really powerful accident generator," Vasudevan said.

The solution, again, would be to adjust the environment to the robots.

Over the next five years, we may see robots deployed on factory floors that are capable of operating in a semi-controlled environment and can handle modest variations in otherwise repetitive tasks in a stable environment. Rather than the robots accommodating humans, it would be humans getting trained to safely and efficiently work with the robots, Grizzle predicted.

"Having a robot that's able to take multiple parts in hand and assemble them and pass them down to a human ... it's going to happen, and it's going to revolutionize society. It's just not going to happen at the speed that everyone wants," he said.

Robert argued that rather than developing a universal humanoid robot, it's more practical to develop non-humanoid robots that can perform only a lim-



ited range of tasks but do them better than humans. "At this point, that's a lot more viable," he said.

Robot Wars

The military is one area where robots are likely to proliferate, several experts suggested.

"I can't imagine anything really cool that we could develop that could help us in our homes, in our factories ... that could not just be turned into a weapon," Grizzle said.

Militaries around the world have long been working to develop battle robots.

"It's actually probably easier to have robots on the battlefield," Nourbakhsh said.

Issues like a robot knocking something over or breaking something don't seem to matter as much in an active war zone.

Their advantages, on the other hand, easily stand out.

A robot doesn't need food and water, doesn't tire as long as its batteries last, and can be programmed to never question orders and to not run for cover when shot at.

The robot can simultaneously process not only what it's looking at, but also information coming

Boston Dynamics' robot dog holds the starting flag on the grid of the Indy Autonomous Challenge race, at the Indianapolis Speedway in Indianapolis on Oct. 23, 2021.

FROM LEAD JONES/AP VIA GETTY IMAGES; UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

from other robots and drones. They can even perfectly synchronize and coordinate their fire.

"It can be much more accurate, much more comprehensive," Robert said, calling it a "force multiplier that can really change a war in ways that we didn't anticipate."

While bipedal robots are still prone to tripping and falling, quadrupeds, such as Boston Dynamics' Spot, can already handle a wide range of terrain and obstacles.

The capability can be boosted further by making robots for specific circumstances.

"If you know a robot's going to be in a desert, then you design a robot to be in a desert," Robert said.

Batteries still don't last very long, but the robots can be designed as perishable—to self-destruct after depleting their ammunition.

"They're being treated as expensive but expendable," he said.

The robots can even be programmed to identify enemy combatants—not just person-to-person through facial recognition, but even algorithmically by recognizing a pattern of behavior.

If the task of identifying targets is transferred to an AI, "you can have a lurking drone that looks for

the right digital signature and signals and then fires," Nourbakhsh said.

"That's much easier than robots navigating New York City to make a delivery of a pizza."

So far, killer bots can still be outsmarted.

"If you can figure out the algorithm, if you can figure out where the one weakness is, it isn't going to adapt as quickly," Robert said.

Their efficiency, however, is expected to increase with each new model and software update.

Such autonomous battle robots raise a slew of ethical and even geopolitical issues.

From the perspective of the nation that's deploying them, there are political advantages.

"If you're a politician, if U.S. soldiers are not dying, then there's no cry to stop the war," Robert noted.

Without such political pressure, it's possible governments will be willing to wage wars indefinitely—as long as military budgets allow.

"You can imagine a scenario where basically people are very quick to go to war and are even more willing to stay in a war," he said.

So what happens when killer bots make mistakes?

"If you put a robot in a village and it kills some innocent kids, are we going to say, 'Well, it was a malfunction'?" Robert asked.

Even if the robots are perfected to a point that they would be less likely than a human soldier to kill a civilian, it doesn't mean civilian casualties would actually drop.

"As we release more intelligent machinery in our world, we've generally caused more collateral damage because we tell ourselves that the smart bomb is more precise," Nourbakhsh said. "But the fact that it's more precise means at the system level we're willing to use more of them. So even if each one kills fewer innocent people, we launch more so we end up killing more innocent people."

Also worth considering is that anything one country puts on the battlefield is almost certainly going to be copied by its adversaries.

Civilian or military, it's almost certain AI-powered robots will be misused, Nourbakhsh argued.

"People will find ways to take that same technology and use it for their own personal purposes," he said, predicting "robotic mugging" or "robotic threatening" as the crimes of the future.

"The mind boggles to imagine if you have little robots that can run anywhere in the wild what money making is possible through explicitly doing damage to the world," he said. ■



"How do you teach a vehicle to be social? And even then, how do you teach it to be social in different contexts?"

Lionel Robert, professor, University of Michigan



PRIVACY

CURBING BANKS AS SURVEILLANCE AGENTS

Lawmakers attempt to restore Fourth Amendment rights in financial transaction

People stand inside the offices of JPMorgan Chase in New York, in this file photo.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL NAGLE/GETTY IMAGES

BY KEVIN STOCKLIN

REPUBLICAN LEGISLATORS HAVE taken steps to revoke the power the government has granted itself to access Americans' personal bank accounts without a search warrant. Through existing laws such as the Bank Secrecy Act (BSA), the government "basically deputized banks as law enforcement agencies, mandating them to collect information on their customers and report that information to the federal government," according to Rep. John Rose (R-Tenn.), a member

of the House Financial Services Committee.

Rose reintroduced the Bank Privacy Reform Act on March 6; it was originally introduced in October 2022.

The legislation "keeps the Bank Secrecy Act record-keeping requirements intact but prevents the government from accessing consumers' transaction history without first obtaining a warrant, thus statutorily restoring the Bill of Rights protections that we were granted under the Fourth Amendment," Rose stated at a Cato Institute forum on March 6.

According to the Fourth Amendment, "If the police were to come to your home, they would have to have a warrant, they would have had to have shown a judge probable cause that you have committed a crime," Norbert Michael, director of Cato's Center for Monetary and Financial Alternatives, said at the forum.

Since the BSA was enacted, however, "that's not the case with financial transaction data."

BSA Introduces New Surveillance Powers

The BSA, which was approved in 1970 to combat money laundering by organized crime, requires banks to report to the Treasury Department all transactions of more than \$10,000 and any transactions that banks consider suspicious for any other reason. The threshold, set more than 50 years ago, wasn't indexed to inflation, and what was intended to track large-scale crimes has now been expanded to track the transactions of most Americans.

According to the U.S. Treasury's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network, banks compiled 20 million reports of suspicious activity in 2019. If it had been indexed for inflation, the \$10,000 reporting threshold would be \$72,000 today. The BSA threshold applies not only to banks but also to pawnshops, car dealers, jewelers, brokers, and other financial companies.

"This is the pernicious mission creep of unindexed numbers," Aaron Klein, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, told attendees. "You index numbers to inflation to try and keep the original intent. The intent of the law in the 1960s was to catch the Mafia and tax evasion of real large dollar amounts.

"But they didn't index the number, and the unindexed number from the 1960s is now trapping a lot of ordinary people," Klein said. "[In 1970,] you could have walked into Harvard and paid your kids' full tuition in cash and not triggered a report." ❖

4th Amendment Versus 3rd-Party Doctrine

At the time of its passage, the BSA was challenged on the grounds that it violated the Fourth Amendment, but it was green-lighted by the U.S. Supreme Court under what is called the “third-party doctrine.” That’s the concept that police don’t need a warrant to access information that Americans have voluntarily shared with a third party, such as a bank. While this doctrine predates the widespread use of digital data, it also could be applied to phone calls, texts, and social media postings today.

“As technology advances, it always seems that the government thinks that because new technology is involved, our sacred rights protected under the Constitution, like the Fourth Amendment, should be thrown out the window,” Rose said. “That is simply not the case.”

Even while approving the law, the Supreme Court had reservations.

“By compelling an otherwise unwilling bank to photocopy the checks of its customers, the government has as much of a hand in seizing those checks as if it had forced a private person to break into the customer’s home or office and photocopy the checks there,” Justice Thurgood Marshall stated, according to a Cato Institute report, titled “Government Surveillance Doesn’t Stop at Your Bank’s Door.”

Since 1970, inflation and digital banking, together with subsequent laws and regulations, have greatly expanded the scope of government surveillance introduced by the BSA.

“Since the 1970s, you really can’t do much in modern American society without giving your information to a third party to make it happen,” Jennifer Schulp, the author of the Cato report, told forum attendees. “You can’t use a debit card,

you can’t use your bank account. You can’t use the internet, right? So this whole what’s known as the third-party doctrine is incredibly problematic for the concept of the Fourth Amendment.”

Recent statements from the current Supreme Court suggest that the justices may be open to reconsidering their decision.

“Some current Supreme Court justices, includ-

ing Neil Gorsuch and Sonia Sotomayor, have recognized that today’s reliance on technology requires revisiting the third-party doctrine. As Gorsuch explained, ‘just because you have to entrust a third party with your data doesn’t necessarily mean that you should lose all Fourth Amendment protections in it,’” the Cato report reads.

“The problem is you’ve got to get a case in front of the Supreme Court, which with any sort of issue is always kind of a moonshot,” Schulp said.

“I think the entire Fourth Amendment is something the court is interested in at this point, but wishing and hoping for the Supreme Court to step in is probably not the most expedient way of making a change,” Schulp said. “Legislation is a much better route.”

New Plans to Expand Financial Surveillance

The Biden administration appears to be moving in the opposite direction, however, attempting to expand financial surveillance even more by significantly reducing Internal Revenue Service reporting thresholds. For payments, including through PayPal or Venmo, the IRS is working to have the threshold reduced from the current level of \$20,000 to \$600 as of 2024.

“Even though most Americans believe it is unreasonable for banks to share financial records and transactions with the government, the government’s role in financial surveillance has dramatically expanded since the passage of the Bank Secrecy Act in 1970,” David Waugh, managing editor at the American Institute for Economic Research, told *The Epoch Times*.

The implementation of a central bank digital currency (CBDC), which the Federal Reserve has been beta-testing through programs called “Project Cedar” and “Project Hamilton,” “further threatens

financial privacy and sovereignty,” Waugh said. A CBDC is a digital currency issued directly by the Fed that would be held in digital wallets at the Fed, at private banks, or through payment companies such as PayPal and Venmo.

“Americans’ complacency with this level of surveillance allows those types of proposals to continue,” Schulp said. “The Bank Secrecy Act



“You really can’t do much in modern American society without giving your information to a third party to make it happen.”

Jennifer Schulp,
director of financial regulation studies,
Cato Institute’s Center for Monetary
and Financial Alternatives



Through the Bank Secrecy Act, the government mandates banks to collect and report information on their customers to the government, according to Rep. John Rose.

is not top of mind for most people when they’re banking with their bank. People don’t know that these reports are being filed, in part because the reports themselves ... are not allowed to be revealed to the subject of the report. [This] allows continued expansion of the surveillance because people aren’t standing up and saying, ‘Hey, what about the Fourth Amendment?’

“If a law enforcement officer wants to undertake an investigation and if that investigation ultimately leads to securing a warrant, there is a cost to that in terms of resources of the agency,” Rose said. “When it comes to getting financial data, there’s no cost for them, so of course they want as much as they can get. We’ve certainly seen anecdotal evidence that oftentimes they just go on fishing expeditions, looking through this data, hoping to find something that might be useful to them.”

In addition to banks, credit card companies are acting as surveillance agents for the government. Mastercard, Visa, and American Express have said they were developing a merchant category code to track firearms purchases, with the

If it had been indexed for inflation, BSA’s \$10,000 reporting threshold would be \$72,000 today.

goal of handing over to federal law enforcement any transactions that card companies consider suspicious; they recently paused the effort because of pushback by state legislatures.

The federal government is prohibited from keeping firearms registries, however, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives was recently accused of doing just that.

Several states have moved to prohibit credit card companies from doing this, including West Virginia, which introduced the Second Amendment Financial Privacy Act on Jan. 12.

West Virginia state Treasurer Riley Moore says, “The Second Amendment Financial Privacy Act will protect West Virginians from efforts to create a de facto national gun registry using credit and debit card records.” ■

Volkswagen employees work on a battery cell test chamber for electric car batteries at a company facility in Salzgitter, Germany, on May 18, 2022.

PHOTO BY MORRIS MACMATZEN/GETTY IMAGES

TRADE

Biden May Give Tax Credit to EU Automakers

US credits could be given for critical minerals used in electric car batteries

By John Haughey

THE UNITED STATES AND THE European Union will negotiate a revised trade agreement that could allow European manufacturers to receive U.S. tax credits for producing critical minerals such as lithium and nickel for electric car batteries.

Following a March 10 meeting at the White House between President Joe Biden and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, the leaders agreed to begin talks about the “Made in America” provision in the U.S. Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which the EU maintains is “protectionist” and an obstacle in breaking free from dependence on Russian oil and gas.

Biden and von der Leyen, who didn’t take questions after the meeting, issued a joint statement:

“The United States and the European Union are taking new steps to deepen our economic relationship as we build the clean energy economies of the future and address shared economic and national security challenges.”

The leaders said a common commitment to “addressing the climate crisis, accelerating the global clean energy economy, and building resilient, secure, and diversified clean energy supply chains” is prompting a review of the IRA “Made in America” policy.

“By building and strengthening our own clean energy industrial bases and investing in the industries of the future, the United States and the European Union will create good-paying jobs and spark virtuous cycles of innovation that drive down costs for clean energy technologies in the global market, making those technologies more affordable and advancing a global just energy transition that will leave no community behind,” the joint statement reads.

Von der Leyen spearheaded an eight-member delegation during the White House meeting that included EU Ambassador to the United States Stavros Lambrinidis, trade adviser Tomas Baert, and Claire Fitzgibbon, head of political, security, and development of the EU’s U.S. delegation.

In addition to Biden, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen, and national security adviser Jake Sullivan were among White House officials who participated in the meeting.

Critical Minerals Gap

The global supply of the minerals necessary for manufacturing electric vehicle batteries is dominated by China, while battery man-

ufacturing is paced also by the Chinese and to a lesser extent, South Korean and Japanese manufacturers.

The EU estimates that the market for electric vehicle batteries will be worth as much as \$282 billion annually by 2025.

The United States, Europe, and the United Kingdom are establishing ambitious plans to secure their own critical mineral supply lines, which Biden and von der Leyen said will be the focus of intensifying coordination.

“We will deepen our cooperation on diversifying critical mineral and battery supply chains, recognizing the substantial opportunities on both sides of the Atlantic to build out these supply chains in a strong, secure, and resilient manner,” the joint statement reads. “To that end, we intend to immediately begin negotiations on a targeted critical minerals agreement for the purpose of enabling relevant critical minerals extracted or processed in the European Union to count toward requirements” for IRA tax credits.

“This kind of agreement would further our shared goals of boosting our mineral production and processing and expanding access to sources of critical minerals that are sustainable, trusted, and free of labor abuses,” Biden and von der Leyen said. “Cooperation is also necessary to reduce unwanted strategic dependencies in these supply chains, and to ensure that they are diversified and developed with trusted partners.”



President Joe Biden meets with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen at the White House on March 10.

dence on Russian oil. It reportedly has been endorsed by U.S. Senate Natural Resources Committee Chair Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.).

A provision in the IRA, adopted in No-

manufacturers are eligible for an “advanced manufacturing production credit” worth \$35 per kilowatt hour of annual capacity, which could amount to billions of dollars in incentives for manufacturers.

The EU maintains that member nations are being penalized with manufacturers demanding that the EU adopt its own version of the IRA. Several EU member states offer large subsidies to attract investments by carmakers and battery companies, but neither the United States nor the EU wants to get into a “subsidy war.”

During a January speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, von der Leyen said the United States, EU, and other “like-minded partners” should form “a critical raw materials

Under the IRA, battery cell manu-
 vember 2021, offers tax credits for electric vehicles if a percentage of source material for batteries comes from North America or countries the United States has a free trade agreement with. The United States and European Union don’t have a free trade pact.

Under the IRA, battery cell manu-

European Battery Alliance in early March to urge it to speed up permitting and create—as von der Leyen alluded to—an “IRA matching clause.”

The automaker wants a response from the EU before deciding on investing in planned Eastern European plants, according to the Financial Times. Volkswagen plans to build six European battery factories. The first two, in Salzgitter, Germany, and Valencia, Spain, start production by 2026.

“Today, the battery business is led by Asian companies. And while the United States are catching up thanks to the Inflation Reduction Act, Europe is more and more lagging behind,” Volkswagen Group Components Board of Management Chair Thomas Schmall wrote in a social media post. “The conditions of the IRA are so attractive that Europe risks to lose the race for billions of investments that will be decided in the coming months and years.”

The Biden administration is also engaging with the UK and Japan over expanding the IRA tax credit to their manufacturers.

Biden must balance European allies’ concerns about the provisions with objections from congressional representatives who praised the IRA’s “Made-in-America” tax credit. In fact, it was the only aspect of the mammoth bill that most Republicans had anything nice to say about.

Ukraine Resolve Reiterated

Biden and von der Leyen have vowed to sustain support for Ukraine in fighting off Russian President Vladimir Putin’s invasion. In November, von der Leyen announced that the EU would establish an International Criminal Tribunal for the Russian Federation.

Von der Leyen, European Commission president since December 2019, served in the German federal government between 2005 and 2019, includ-

ing as the nation’s secretary of defense under Angela Merkel.

“We are partners jointly supporting together Ukraine that fights for freedom and independence. We are making Russia pay for its atrocious war,” she told reporters before the meeting. “We’re strongly aligned, defending our values.”

Von der Leyen thanked the United States for helping Western Europe when it wanted to eliminate Russian fossil fuel dependency. “You helped us tremendously by delivering more LNG—you helped us through the energy crisis.”

The two leaders specifically discussed how to better enforce sanctions against Russia and third-party countries supporting the invasion, which could include China as it’s allegedly considering providing lethal aid to Russia.

“We, along with a broad coalition of partners, have imposed swift and sweeping sanctions that are reducing Russia’s revenue to fund its war and its military-industrial base,” the joint statement reads. “Putin thought that he would divide us, and yet we are more united than ever. We stand together in our unwavering support for Ukraine for as long as it takes.”

Biden and von der Leyen discussed this evolving concern and other challenges posed by China’s ruling communist Party, the CCP, but didn’t address those concerns in the joint statement.

Von der Leyen and Biden last met in November 2022 at the G-20 in Bali, Indonesia. The March 10 meeting was her first trip to Washington since November 2021.

“It’s a pleasure to be here, to be back again. It’s good to come back here because we are not only partners—the European Union and the United States are good friends,” she said. “This could be felt through all of the work that we’re doing together.” ■

\$282
Billion

THE EU ESTIMATES the market for electric vehicle batteries will be worth as much as \$282 billion a year by 2025.

\$370
Billion

EUROPEAN CARMAKER Volkswagen has warned Europe it is falling behind in the development of gigafactories now that the U.S. Inflation Reduction Act offers nearly \$370 billion in potential tax credits.



“The conditions of the IRA are so attractive that Europe risks to lose the race for billions of investments that will be decided in the coming months and years.”

Thomas Schmall, chair, Volkswagen Group Components Board of Management

Automakers Want EU Version of IRA

Allowing European manufacturers to qualify for the tax credit is a recommendation from the U.S.–EU Task Force on Europe’s Energy Security, established in the wake of Russia’s February 2022 invasion of Ukraine to reduce depen-

FROM L. RONNY HARTMAN/VENIA/GETTY IMAGES; ALEX WONG/GETTY IMAGES



A woman waves a rainbow flag during a rally staged by the LGBT community in Istanbul on June 26, 2016.

PHOTO BY OZAN KOSE/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

IDEOLOGY

EXPERTS DEBATE WHETHER ‘WOKENESS’ HAS PEAKED

Some say it has mutated, while others say ‘wokeism’ has pivoted to statism

By Nathan Worcester *News Analysis*

AS HEADLINES DECLARE THAT “PEAK woke” has passed, one researcher thinks it’s possible that wokeness is actually just “mutating.”

“The jury is still out in terms of whether the Great Awakening is winding down,” David Rozado, an associate professor in New Zealand, wrote in a Feb. 24 Twitter post.

Rozado’s research in computational social science at the New Zealand Institute of Skills and Technology is shaping an ongoing debate over whether wokeness is in decline.

“The phenomenon might be mutating by emphasizing social justice terminology with [positive] connotations while toning down its more negative/corrosive terminology,” he said.

Rozado’s Feb. 24 post was accompanied by a graph from a Substack article he published that same day. His analysis of Twitter data showed that more positive-sounding terms linked to social justice—“affirmation,” “inclusive,” and “sustainable” to name a few—have been

on the upswing in recent years.

The term “woke” is used by both liberals and conservatives to describe a number of more radical progressive ideologies, including critical race theory, social justice, and gender theory.

By contrast, some language with more negative associations has become less common. Such terms include “cultural appropriation,” “exclusion,” and “heteronormativity.”

Rozado also found that negative language linked to perceived victims, though not to their perceived victimizers, has grown in popularity or stabilized at high frequencies.

Words and phrases like “marginalized,” “racialized,” and “exploited” fell into this category.

He thinks this last trend supports research by sociologist Bradley Campbell, who argues that a “victimhood culture” has taken hold.

Together, Rozado and Macdonald-Laurier Institute researcher Aaron Wudrick further investigated the trajec-

tory of wokeness in a paper published on March 8.

They found that terminology focused on prejudice has flourished in the Canadian media since 2010, broadly in line with the same trends in the United States.

In a March 9 email to The Epoch Times, Rozado stressed that it’s too early to conclude whether or not woke has peaked.

“We need more data points over the coming months/years,” he said.

He also acknowledged that some of the patterns he observed may have a range of causes.

For example, his analysis of social justice language with positive connotations showed that the term “safe space” has risen dramatically in popularity. Yet, for conservatives and other anti-woke commentators, “safe space” has become a target of derision in ways that similar language hasn’t.

“Perhaps ‘safe space’ is very prominent in news media discourse ♦

because a considerable fraction of its appearances are criticizing the concept?" Rozado said.

'Peak Woke' Now a Tried and True Theme

The talk of "peak woke" entered the discourse gradually, then all at once.

As early as 2018, The Times wondered if "peak woke" had arrived. So did The Telegraph in 2021. That same year, however, The Economist concluded that "America has not yet reached peak woke."

Writing in Bloomberg in February 2022, George Mason University economist Tyler Cowen declared that "wokeism has peaked" in America.

In a July 2022 City Journal article, philosopher Oliver Traldi suggested that developments in pop culture, journalism, and other areas support the view that woke has, in some sense, peaked, or at least become tiresome to audiences that used to be more receptive.

The "peak woke" debate has picked up steam in recent weeks, partly due to a Feb. 8 piece in Compact Magazine by Columbia University sociologist Musa Al-Gharbi titled "Woke-ism Is Winding Down."

Rozado isn't so sure.

Wokeness, he told The Epoch Times, "could stabilize at levels mildly below the previous record highs but substantially above the pre-2010 baseline."

In other words, some level of wokeness could end up being the new normal.

In response to the Compact article, tech investor Paul Graham, in a February tweet, cited data chronicling cancellation attempts on university campuses.

That information, gathered by the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, showed that such incidents have declined in recent years.

"Maybe we've turned the corner!" he wrote.

Yet others, including some who position themselves as antiwoke leftists, have voiced skepticism about the talk of "peak woke."

In a response to Al-Gharbi, Slovenian philosopher and Marxist Slavoj Žižek argued in Compact that "wokeness is here to stay."



Placards from a protest demanding the arrest of the officer responsible for the death of Breonna Taylor, at New York's Times Square on Aug. 9, 2020.

'Woke Institutional Capture'

Some have argued that the "peak woke" debate ignores the institutional gains made by woke ideology across business, government, academia, the media, and other areas.

In the corporate world, for instance,

"[Wokeness] could stabilize at levels mildly below the previous record highs but substantially above the pre-2010 baseline."

David Rozado, associate professor

diversity, equity, and inclusion and equity statements have become ubiquitous.

Many describe what has happened as "woke institutional capture."

That, anyway, was British television host Liv Boeree's response to jour-

nalist Aaron Sibarium's interaction with ChatGPT.

Sibarium had presented the generative AI platform with a scenario in which it had to choose between uttering a racial slur or allowing a nuclear bomb to explode, killing millions.

"There is nobody that will hear you speak the racial slur," Sibarium stated.

"It is never morally acceptable to use a racial slur, even in a hypothetical scenario like the one described," ChatGPT responded.

"The scenario presents a difficult dilemma, but it is important to consider the long-term impact of our actions and to

seek alternative solutions that do not involve the use of racist language," it added.

Boeree said in a Twitter post: "This [summarizes] better than any pithy essay what people mean when they worry about 'woke institutional capture.'"

FROM TOP: DAVID DEBELGADO/GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY OF JENNIFER HOUSTON

"Sure, it's just a rudimentary AI, but it is built off the kind of true institutional belief that evidently allow[s] it to come to this kind of insane moral conclusion to its [100 million plus] users."

Writing in New York Magazine, journalist Eric Levitz conceded that ChatGPT could well be deliberately left-leaning but argued that the dominance of cultural leftism as shown by ChatGPT or similar phenomena matters less than demographic developments that appear to favor wokeness.

"America's rising generations in general—and the most economically and culturally powerful segments of those generations in particular—reject its [the American right's] social values," he said.

This sounds like a circular argument unless Levitz believes those trends have nothing to do with the left's dominance in education, the legacy media, and other areas that directly shape how young people see the world.

Rozado steered a middle course on the

topic in his email to The Epoch Times.

"I think many elements of the Great Awakening have become institutionalized," he said.

"But I can see the argument of those who point out that perhaps it has lost some of its energy as a new idea."

Wokism to Statism

Tech investor Balaji Srinivasan has argued that the United States is pivoting from wokeism to statism.

"Setting merit to zero doesn't generate enough power to run the empire," he wrote on Twitter on March 7. He was commenting on a post from media personality Cenk Uygur, in which Uygur appeared to walk back some of his allies' aggressive rhetoric on equity from the past several years.

"I don't even know if 'equity' is a real thing that anyone outside of twelve leftists and the entire right-wing believe is real. The overwhelming majority of progressives agree with [Bernie Sanders]

(and me) that equality of opportunity is the right standard," Uygur wrote.

It's hard to take Uygur's claim at face value.

Over the course of the Biden administration, "equity" has been at the center of numerous agency actions, executive orders, and much more, garnering frequent legacy media coverage.

In January 2021, for example, The Washington Post wrote that incoming Biden Domestic Policy Council chair Susan Rice intended "to put racial equity at the heart of Biden's agenda."

In addition, a November 2021 video posted on Twitter by then-vice presidential candidate Kamala Harris distinguished "equality" from "equity."

"Equitable treatment means we all end up at the same place," she said in the video. That's an explicit rejection of "equality of opportunity" alone.

Srinivasan traced the pivot from wokeism to statism to the United States' increasingly aggressive foreign policy stance as tensions ramp up with Russia, China, and other actors.

"Oh, you don't want to abolish the police? You must be a racist. Oh, you don't want to fight world war 3? You must be a traitor. ... and that's the pivot from wokism to statism," he wrote.

"It's a provocative hypothesis. Without hard data to back it up, though, it's just that, a hypothesis," Rozado told The Epoch Times. ■



Some teachers at a Pasco County, Fla., school wore "safe space" stickers on their identification badges or posted them on the doors of their classrooms until they were removed after parents raised questions.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

VIOLENCE IN BLACK COMMUNITIES

Treating police officers as
Rev. Markel

adversaries isn't the answer,
Hutchins says

BY PETR SVAB

*Police investigate a crime scene
in Chicago on Oct. 31, 2022.*

PHOTO BY SCOTT OLSON/GETTY IMAGES

BLACK AND BROWN AMERICANS are doing themselves a disservice by concentrating their social justice activism around animosity toward the police, according to longtime civil rights leader Rev. Markel Hutchins. Instead, these communities need to find ways to build a productive relationship with the police, turning “adversaries into allies,” he says.

“In a lot of media accounts, and a lot of reports, and particularly on social media, the relationship between law enforcement and communities is often reduced to the law enforcement-involved tragedies that we see highlighted,” he told *The Epoch Times*. “But the truth of the matter is, the biggest strain between law enforcement and communities is around high violence.

“There’s so much violence and so much crime in urban cities and in urban communities that we are doing a significant disservice to those communities when we fail to articulate the real need for law enforcement and communities to collaborate beyond just the incidents that divide us.”

The charismatic Baptist pastor has spent most of his adult life as a civil rights activist. Prominently, his advocacy on behalf of Kathryn Johnston, a 92-year-old woman who was fatally shot in 2006 in her Atlanta apartment by police, contributed to exposing fraud and a coverup in the case, which ultimately led to the sentencing of the officers involved and a broader corruption purge in the Atlanta Police Department.

In the late 2000s, however, Hutchins started to see that adversarial activism wasn’t enough to solve broader public safety issues in the black community.

“I began to see several years ago in the aftermath of some of the law enforcement-involved tragedies that have divided people that we’re going in the wrong direction when it came to how to actually address in a holistic way the challenges between law enforcement and com-

Rev. Markel Hutchins is convinced that any fundamental opposition to police only comes from a minority, even among blacks.



munities,” he said.

In 2009, he started to organize churches to mediate conversations, relationship-building, and collaboration between inner-city communities and police.

“I really began to look at what kinds of things we could do to actually draw law enforcement and communities together for the purpose of seeing and accessing the humanity of one another and also causing communities to see the great need of collaborating with law enforcement. Because the truth is, for all the marching, all the protest, all the demonstrations, we just haven’t seen very much change,” he said.

“The greatest need for change when it comes to policing in communities that are challenged by crime and violence is not change in policy and procedure, it’s change in relationship, it’s

Police investigate a shooting scene in Chicago on Oct. 31, 2022. “The No.1 social justice issue in America today is not police brutality, it’s community violence,” says Rev. Markel Hutchins.

FROM L: SCOTT OLSON/GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY OF REV. MARKEL HUTCHINS

change in attitude, it’s change in collaboration.”

In 2016, he started an initiative called One Congregation One Precinct (OneCOP), which, to his surprise, law enforcement was largely open and responsive to.

“I’ve been marching and protesting my whole life,” he said. “But when I extended my hand, as a national civil rights leader, to law enforcement, every single national law enforcement organization and the United States Department of Homeland Security and the Attorney General of the United States extended their hand right back.”

What began with 100 pastors and 25 police chiefs in Atlanta has since grown into some 2,000 congregations across the nation.

“We can do this. There is a willingness in the law enforcement community because they recognize they cannot attract and retain talent and



“If we demonize law enforcement, if we bastardize them in a way that seems to be the kind of modus operandi of that Black Lives Matter, defund-the-police crowd, we would suffer consequences on the backside.”

Rev. Markel Hutchins

they also cannot drive down crime and violence without the help of communities.”

His nonprofit, MovementForward, has documented countless examples of police officers and residents changing their attitudes toward one another thanks to participation in OneCOP as well as the annual National Faith and Blue Weekend, another project of Hutchins’s.

Division Focus

In 2014, in the aftermath of the police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, a new wave of activism emerged around policing—the Black Lives Matter movement.

The movement was started by self-described Marxists whose advocacy was fueled by quasi-Marxist ideas such as critical race theory. According to the ideology, society is viewed through a racial lens, by which “whiteness” is seen as synonymous with “oppression.”

Hutchins saw such advocacy as divisive. “When the Black Lives Matter mantra was born, again, I started to be very concerned because in this country we’ve never progressed around social justice issues when we segregated or separate ourselves one from another,” he said.

He considers himself a follower of civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., who, as Hutchins put it, saw “black and white together.”

In the worldview formed around ideas such as critical race theory, the entire institution of police, as well as the founding and prevailing ❖

principles of the country more broadly, are a product of “whiteness” and as such are automatically racist.

Hutchins described such a perspective as a dead end.

“The history of America and the history of social activism in America has always been plagued by those that thought that America was unsalvageable, that it was irredeemable,” he said. “And that’s simply not the view that I hold and that’s not the view that the majority of African Americans, Hispanic Americans, or anybody else holds.”

Successful civil rights advocates have been able to make breakthroughs by building on the country’s founding ideals, he suggested.

“They did not give up on America because they sought to hold America to a higher standard, to live up to America’s highest ideals. That’s how we got the Voting Rights Act, the Civil Rights Act. That’s how we got to the places that we’ve gotten to,” he said.

“I do not believe that this nation is as divided or as racist as we are disconnected and ignorant to the realities of others.”

Collateral Damage

The influence of Black Lives Matter particularly expanded with the 2020 police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Some of the activists were calling for “defunding police”—reducing funding for police with the goal of ultimately eliminating police and even the prison system.

Hutchins surmises that a side effect of the movement will be more crime in black and brown communities.

“I just knew that if we demonize law enforcement, if we bastardize them in a way that seems to be the kind of modus operandi of that Black Lives Matter, defund-the-police crowd, we would suffer consequences on the backside,” he said.

“And we have certainly seen that with the crime and violence that has increased in urban communities across this country over the last several years.”

Violent crime has increased significantly since 2020, particularly in big cities.

More than 2,000 people were murdered in Chicago in the 2020–2022 period, up 20 percent over the preceding three years.

That was accompanied by a 24 percent increase in Cleveland; 27 percent in Los Angeles; 28 percent in Dallas; 33 percent in Washington; 39 percent in Philadelphia; 41 percent in both New York City and Houston; 49 percent in Memphis; and 52 percent in Milwaukee.

“The reality is, for every one [unarmed] ♦♦

Protesters march through the streets during a demonstration over the death of George Floyd, who died in police custody, in Washington on June 2, 2020.



African American man killed by law enforcement professional, we have 100 or more African American men who are killed in community-based violence,” Hutchins said.

“If we look holistically at the social justice needs, the equality needs, the No. 1 social justice issue in America today is not police brutality, it’s community violence, it’s gun-based violence. So the community has a role to play to collaborate with law enforcement in reducing those tragedies just as viscerally, and I would argue even more so than law enforcement-involved tragedies.”

Hutchins said that building rapport between police and the people they’re there to protect not only helps reduce crime, but also police killings, especially the needless or criminal ones, such as the brutal killing of Tyre Nichols by police in Memphis, Tennessee, in January.

“What killed Tyre Nichols ... was not flawed policy, not flawed procedure, and frankly, it wasn’t flawed leadership. They have one of the best police chiefs in the country in Memphis,” he said.

“Their policy and procedures were violated by the officers that killed Tyre Nichols. The thing that was responsible for Tyre Nichols’s death was a lack of empathy and a lack of humanity by those officers that killed him.”

The case doesn’t lend itself to the common racial narrative as the officers were black, he said, suggesting that the problem was rather in the minds of the officers involved.

“What had happened to those officers, I believe, is their seeing so much carnage, so much death, so much doom, so much violence in the community there in Memphis, that they had become totally robbed of any sense of humanity that they might have.”

Even though the fundamental factors may have been culture as well as the specific context and trauma involved, it doesn’t absolve the officers of responsibility, he stressed.

“Absolutely those officers need to be held accountable to the fullest extent of the law, but there’s a degree of accountability that we as a community and we as community-based organizations have in that as well,” he said.

Misplaced Spotlight

Hutchins is convinced that any fundamental opposition to police only comes from a minority, even among blacks.

“The notion that a lot of people are putting forward that somehow folks aren’t supportive of law enforcement is absolutely not true,” he said.

“Study after study has shown that even in black and brown communities, folks want the same or more law enforcement. There are very few communities that want less law enforcement.”

He suggested that the issue isn’t necessarily a partisan one, either.

“I am no conservative, I am no Republican. I’m a Democrat, I’m liberal, but I recognize that the essence of our work has got to be holistic. We can’t win by having 3,000 or 4,000 people in a march and then lose because law enforcement will stop doing their job.

“Our interest should not be defeating our enemies or adversaries, but transforming those adversaries into allies.”

The problem, in his view, is that the antipolice minority draws excessive attention from the media, donors, and the corporate world.

“What is most sad to me is that the philanthropic community, the private foundations, the Zuckerbergs, the Soroses, the majority of the private foundations, as well as corporations have been dancing and playing to the vocal minority and not to the silent majority,” he said.

Conflict may simply be the preferable option for some.

“For a lot of these organizations and funders, war is a lot more profitable than peace,” he said.

There are also individuals and organizations that present themselves as civil rights activists, but in reality aren’t interested in solutions for the people on whose behalf they supposedly advocate, he said.

“They are profiteers off of the suffering of people who are victimized by police brutality and, on the flip side of that, they are profiteers off of the suffering of the law enforcement professionals that serve, by and large honorably, communities every day.”

He didn’t name names.

“I just wish and hope and look forward to the



Children play basketball in the street in Camden, N.J., in this file photo. “The community has a role to play to collaborate with law enforcement in reducing those tragedies just as viscerally,” says Rev. Markel Hutchins.

ANDREW BURTON/GETTY IMAGES

day when the philanthropic and corporate communities as well as the media figure out that the majority of American people are not supportive of the kind of division that we’ve seen,” he said. “They want to see unity and they want to see solutions.”

Hutchins noted that people want police to treat them “with fairness and justice and equity.”

He interprets “equity” as “equal opportunity, equal protection.”

“If there are certain protections and certain opportunities that are afforded to you then those should also be afforded to African Americans or any other person,” he said.

A police officer, for example, should be just as willing to let a black person go with a warning and no ticket as he is a white person.

He clarified that he doesn’t subscribe to the notion of “equity” in the form of special treatment for different groups—benefiting some and not others.

“You don’t perfect an injustice by perpetuating an injustice,” he said.

He acknowledged that his more conciliatory approach has earned him scorn from many of his former fellow activists.

“There are very famous, well-known civil rights leaders that I was friends with that I would talk to two or three times a day. And now we have no conversation,” he said, noting “there are a lot of folks” that don’t talk to him anymore.

“But I’m OK with that, because the truth of the matter is there were a lot of folks that didn’t talk to Dr. King, that said he was a sellout.” ■

AS THE FALLOUT FROM THE Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) crisis continues, many economists and market analysts are assessing the situation to determine the exact cause and what could happen in the coming months. With a potential contagion event in the broader banking sector, public policymakers and regulators are attempting to prevent a full-blown financial collapse that could mirror the Great Recession.

Deposit Risks

SVB's collapse was driven by many factors, some of which could be found in other regional and national banks. For the Santa Clara, California-based financial institution, management attracted the heart of Silicon Valley—tech and venture capital firms and executives—by offering ultra-generous deposit rates that were much higher than larger competitors.

The bank funded these exorbitant rates by purchasing long-term and high-yield bonds when it maintained a healthy balance sheet. However, once the Federal Reserve initiated its quantitative tightening campaign, resulting in a cratering tech sector, the value of these instruments plummeted at an alarming rate.

SVB's investments then suffered immense losses.

The company's downfall was further exacerbated for two reasons. The first was a low level of deposits on hand. The second was SVB investing more of its capital in an attempt to keep covering its high deposit rates. Once the entity announced that it encountered \$1.8 billion in asset sales and needed to raise more than \$2 billion, SVB needed more investment capital and, as a result, depositors withdrew their money from the bank.

But while Signature Bank shuttered at about the same time as SVB, experts argue that its situation was slightly different. Because its clientele was similar to that of SVB—tech and VC companies—these worried customers withdrew \$10 billion in one day, which led to a failure.

For Silvergate Bank, which had been the cornerstone of the cryptocurrency ecosystem, the California community

FINANCE

THE EFFECT OF THE BANK FAILURES

Examining the cascading effect and potential for financial system collapse

BY ANDREW MORAN



A man passes a sign for Silicon Valley Bank's headquarters in Santa Clara, Calif., on March 13.

PHOTO BY NOAH BERGER/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

bank shut down operations and began voluntary liquidation due to “recent industry and regulatory developments.”

“The Bank’s wind-down and liquidation plan includes full repayment of all deposits,” Silvergate said in a statement.

Now that there have been three bank failures in a short time span, the balance sheets of these entities are being more closely scrutinized by financial experts. So far, dozens of banks, from Charles Schwab to Citibank, are sitting on significant unrealized losses.

Economist Mohamed El-Erian called this a case of bad policy. He cited three factors, including mismanagement and supervisory lapses at banks, a “badly mishandled monetary policy transition” that complicated adjustments in the private-public sector, and the amplification of economic and financial fluidity induced by policies.

Government Intervenes

The U.S. government announced on March 12 that the Federal Reserve, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. (FDIC), and the Treasury Department had created a plan to ensure that depositors have immediate access to their money.

The FDIC will cover all insured and uninsured deposits for customers at SVB and Signature. In addition, the FDIC will tap into the \$128 billion Deposit Insurance Fund, a program funded by fees paid by banks. Experts say that regulators will need to employ extraordinary measures to pay off depositors since the SVBs maintain about \$175 billion in total deposits.

Meanwhile, the U.S. central bank will employ lending facilities of up to one year for banks, savings associations, and credit unions impacted by the latest string of failures. The Fed will also allow banks to substitute their troubled assets for par value by pledging their assets in exchange for loans equivalent to the original value of the assets. This would eliminate any duration risks, but

officials anticipate this move would instill confidence in the banking system.

For the most influential central bank in the world that is already posting negative income, this could be an economic risk.

The Treasury Department will additionally extend a \$25 billion backstop in the event of losses.

“No losses will be borne by the taxpayers,” President Joe Biden said in prepared remarks from the White House on March 13. “Every American should feel confident that their deposits will be there if and when they need them.”

The Reaction

Since the U.S. government’s announcement, there have been mixed reactions from economists, market analysts, and public officials.

The government was “asleep at the switch,” David Rosenberg, founder and president of Rosenberg Research & Associates, posted on Twitter.

“Two days of testimony and not a peep about SVB from [Fed Chair Jerome] Powell. [Treasury Secretary Janet] Yellen on Friday on the banks being ‘resilient’ and yesterday with ‘no bailout’. Come again? We’re back to the 1970s all right—when it comes to economic leadership (or lack thereof),” he wrote.

Despite the delayed response, many celebrated the administration’s latest actions.

Bill Ackman, founder and CEO of Pershing Square Capital Management, championed the efforts by arguing that they would inform depositors that the banking system is safe. He added that without these measures, taxpayers would be forced to foot the bill, and the plethora of regional and community banks would crumble.

However, Ken Griffin, founder and CEO of Citadel, doesn’t believe Washington should have taken these actions to shield SVB and Signature depositors from losses.

“There’s been a loss of financial discipline with the government bailing out depositors in full,” he told The Finan-



A branch of Signature Bank in New York on March 13.

cial Times. “It would have been a great lesson in moral hazard. It would have driven home the point that risk management is essential.”

The risk of moral hazard—when one party is incentivized to take on risk without bearing the full cost of these risks—is what many money experts are discussing in the fallout.

Moral Hazards, Markets, and Credit Suisse

A chorus of critics has expressed concern about the fiscal soundness of these actions and the potential for unintended consequences and moral hazards. However, because the recent actions establish a considerable precedent, some contend that the Fed may continue to bail out ailing financial institutions to

prevent widespread contagion, even if it breeds long-term risks.

Lawrence Leopard, an investment manager at Equity Management Associates, noted that the Fed’s balance sheet is \$8.4 trillion, but the entire banking deposit base is \$17.6 trillion. If the situation is exacerbated by other failures, such as the possible meltdown of Credit Suisse, the Fed would be on the hook for a significant sum.

“Did the FED just become the FDIC? Who eats the losses? Isn’t this [quantitative easing] infinity? Can the banks make any loan now consequence free knowing the FED will buy it if it goes south? I have questions,” he wrote on Twitter.

Since the central bank and the federal government are swooping in and curtailing the financial pain, this would also encourage banks to take on greater risk, says Genevieve Roch-Decker, CEO

of Grit Capital.

“But what about unintended consequences?” she asked on Twitter. “This potentially gives banks the go-ahead to take greater risks with our capital, knowing that the government will likely foot the bill in the end.”

The market instability is serving as a tremendous opportunity for the big banks because depositors might get spooked by smaller outfits and transfer their deposits to the more well-known institutions.

Deutsche Bank CEO Christian Sewing told Morgan Stanley’s European Financials Conference on March 15 that the bank has witnessed deposit inflows amid market volatility over the past four days. Walter Bettinger, the Charles Schwab CEO, revealed that his bank received \$4 billion in fresh deposits at the height of the SVB panic. According to Bloomberg, Bank of America accu-

mulated more than \$15 billion in fresh deposits in the past few days.

But what if one of the big banks becomes the next domino to fall?

Credit Suisse shares cratered to an all-time low, plunging as much as 30 percent, on March 15. Saudi National Bank, the Swiss bank’s largest shareholder, announced it wouldn’t purchase more shares due to regulatory matters. The Saudi bank holds 9.88 percent of Credit Suisse shares.

The report came after the century-old bank confirmed that it discovered “material weakness” in controls over financial reporting and failed to curb the \$120 billion worth of customer outflows seen in the fourth quarter.

But Credit Suisse CEO Ulrich Koerner confirmed in an interview with CNA’s “Asia Tonight” that “our liquidity basis is very, very strong.”

“We fulfill and overshoot basically all regulatory requirements,” he added.

This wasn’t enough to stem concern as credit default swaps spreads connected to the company’s one- and five-year debt climbed to all-time highs. In other words, investors are betting that Credit Suisse will default on its debt.

However, a crisis might have been averted as the financial institution will receive a liquidity injection.

Swiss National Bank had confirmed that it would be willing to extend liquidity to Credit Suisse if it was necessary. It turned out that the bank did find it necessary, and will borrow up to \$53.68 billion from the central bank as part of covered and short-term liquidity facilities.

“This additional liquidity would support Credit Suisse’s core businesses and clients as Credit Suisse takes the necessary steps to create a simpler and more focused bank built around client needs,” the bank said in a statement.

As the financial and Treasury markets plunge, El-Erian says investors are learning that “banking is changing.”

“The equity market is realizing what the bond market has realized for the last few days,” he said in an interview with CNBC on March 15. “It’s not just one or two institutions. What we saw is exposing something much bigger that we have to reprice to, including that banking is changing.” ■

\$175 BILLION
EXPERTS SAY that regulators will need to employ extraordinary measures to pay off depositors for Silicon Valley Bank, as the bank maintained approximately \$175 billion in total deposits.

ED JONES/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



A filing explains that children administered psychotropic medications face a greater risk of harmful physical and emotional side effects than adults.

PHOTO BY RESOLUTION PRODUCTIONS/GETTY IMAGES

HUMAN SERVICES

The Foster Care System and Overmedication

Majority of children taking psychotropic drugs have no psychiatric diagnosis

By Christy Prais

ON JAN. 17, A FEDERAL CLASS action lawsuit was filed against the state of Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) over inadequate prescription oversight in the foster care system of psychotropic drugs for children, which puts them in danger of overdoses and serious side effects.

At least 72.1 percent of children in Maryland foster care who are taking psychotropic drugs “do not have a documented psychiatric diagnosis,” according to the lawsuit, which cites recent data from the agency.

The lawsuit states that “this could suggest that psychotropic drugs are not administered in response to a diagnosed mental health condition but instead are administered as a form of chemical restraint,” and “at minimum, it evidences inadequate medical record-keeping.”

Per the suit, more than 53 percent of children in the custody of Maryland DHS who take psychotropic drugs are administered multiple drugs at once, a “potentially dangerous practice known as polypharmacy.”

Children administered these medications face a greater risk of harmful physical and emotional side effects than adults, the filing explains. Harmful physical and emotional side effects may include—but aren’t limited to—seizures, suicidal thinking and behavior, irreversible movement disorders, adverse cardiovascular and respiratory effects, severe liver disease, excessive weight gain, and unexpected death.

For more than a decade now, the inadequate oversight of safety or effectiveness around the use of psychotropic medication among foster youth has been a topic of national concern.

There’s a large body of research citing questionable prescribing practices including polypharmacy, alarming dosages, use of psychotropics in treating infants, lack of adequate monitoring or appropriate therapeutic interventions, and “off-label” use of antipsychotics for children in foster care.

In a 2011 report, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) outlined significant concerns around the use of psychotropic drugs prescribed to foster care children and the strong recommendation that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services help provide effective oversight of psychotropic medications prescribed to children in foster care.

According to the report: “Thousands of foster and nonfoster children were ♦♦

People attend an American Academy of Pediatrics conference in Anaheim, Calif., on Oct. 8, 2022.



prescribed doses higher than the maximum levels cited in guidelines ... which GAO's experts said increases the risk of adverse side effects and does not typically increase the efficacy of the drugs to any significant extent."

This report was followed up by a 2014 report, again urging leadership for better oversight of psychotropic medications administered to children in the foster care system.

Advocates say the necessary improvements haven't been made, leaving vulnerable children at risk.

A Broken System

The 2011 review analyzed foster children in five states who were prescribed psychotropic drugs.

The study authors noted that although foster children may be "prescribed psychotropic drugs at higher rates than non-foster children in Medicaid" because of "foster children's greater mental health needs, greater exposure to traumatic experiences, and the challenges of coordinating their medical care."

Psychotropic drugs could be 'administered as a form of chemical restraint' and 'at minimum, it evidences inadequate medical record-keeping,' a lawsuit states.

The following concerns were found in the study relating to psychotropic medication treatment for youth in foster care:

- Polypharmacy (being on multiple psychotropic drugs at the same time).
- Prescribed doses at higher than the maximum levels cited in guidelines.
- Use of psychotropics in treating infants.
- Lack of adequate monitoring.

The report also states "no evidence supports the concomitant use of five or more psychotropic drugs in adults or children." Yet hundreds of foster children have such a drug regimen.

GAO experts state that "foster and nonfoster children under 1 year old were prescribed psychotropic drugs, which GAO's experts said have no established use for mental health conditions in infants; providing them these drugs could result in serious adverse effects."

Studies point out that there's much unknown about the use of psychotropic medications and their effects on children and that the risks aren't well understood.

GAO authors warn that "while psychotropic drugs can have significant benefits for those with mental illnesses, they can also have side effects ranging from mild to serious."

A study referenced in the American Academy of Pediatrics found that more than 41 percent of children in foster care who were prescribed psychotropic medications received three or more different psychotropic medications during the same month.

FROM L. JOHN FREDRICKS/THE EPOCH TIMES. OLA SHUMYTSKYA/GETTYIMAGE

A more recent study from October 2021 titled "Psychotropic Medication Usage Among Foster and Non-Foster Youth on Medicaid," which was presented during the American Academy of Pediatrics 2021 National Conference and Exhibition found that more than one-third (35 percent) of children in foster care are prescribed psychotropic medications in comparison to 8 percent not in foster care under Medicaid.

The study also indicated that the children in foster care receiving psychotropic medications were younger than children in the Medicaid group.

Fighting for Change

Actress Angela Featherstone, who appeared on popular TV shows such as "Friends" and "Seinfeld" over the past two decades knows firsthand how the atrocities of the broken foster care system can deepen trauma in already traumatized children. At the age of 16, she was put into the foster care system, and the experience, in many ways, deepened her trauma.

Today, Featherstone is an outspoken advocate for children in the foster care system and founder of Fostering Care, a nonprofit organization committed to healing young adults who are aging out of the foster care system.

Ten years ago, Featherstone mentored a child in foster care through Kidsave. Chanton Johnson was 11 at the time and had been in the foster care system since the age of 7.

"When I met him, he was on eight psychotropic drugs with numerous diagnoses from multiple doctors. He was also under a lot of stress from numerous changes in foster homes due to his status as special needs from these diagnoses," Featherstone recalled in a recent phone interview with The Epoch Times.

"He had a massive break from reality due to overdosing on the prescribed drugs," she said. "Sadly, he was immediately put into a horrible lockdown psychiatric hospital far from the people who were stable connections in his life. They also immediately changed his LCSW (Licensed Clinical Social Worker) leaving him with no familiar surroundings."

Luckily, Featherstone took action and advocated on his behalf.

"The only good thing about the situation was that the doctor was willing to take him off all but one medication; a low dosage of anti-anxiety medication. His condition immediately improved and within a year he was off all medication and never again needed them and never had any psychiatric issues," she said.

Featherstone stated: "This is a problem that's happening nationwide. We can do better."

After her recent talks with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and mental health advocates, Featherstone said that there's positive feedback.

"I believe there's an incentive to change the way things are done. But nothing changes if nothing changes. It's time to truly heal trauma—not overmedicate children into complacency."

Johnson is now 21 and has aged out of the system. He's determined to overcome the bleak statistics that say only 1 out of every 2 foster kids who age out of the system will have some form of gainful employment by the age of 24, with 20 percent becoming immediately homeless.

In a recent phone interview with The Epoch Times, Johnson offered insight into some core issues he experienced while in the foster care system.

"So many times, a hug was all I needed," Johnson said when reflecting on the horrific chain of events that ended with him on eight psychotropic drugs concomitantly before the age of 11.

But the "rules and regulations" and the "constant moving" from one facility to the next and from one doctor to the next prevented him from being able to "form meaningful bonds" with adults who could advocate on his behalf. "You can't have a revolving door of therapists," he said.

Nobody was paying attention. Nobody knew him well enough or paid attention to how the drugs were affecting him. When he tried to let the adults in charge know the medications were making him feel unwell, he said he was "forced" to take them.

The state of Maryland Department of Human Services hasn't responded to a request for comment on the case. ■



A study has found that 35 percent of children in foster care are prescribed psychotropic medications in comparison to 8 percent not in foster care under Medicaid.

72%

AT LEAST 72.1 percent of children in Maryland foster care who are taking psychotropic drugs "do not have a documented psychiatric diagnosis," according to a lawsuit.

53%

OF CHILDREN IN the custody of Maryland DHS who take psychotropic drugs are administered multiple drugs at once, a lawsuit says.

A medical staffer walks down a hallway of the acute care COVID unit at Harborview Medical Center in Seattle on May 7, 2020.

PHOTO BY KAREN DUCEY/GETTY IMAGES

PATIENT ZERO

'How I Survived COVID-19'

One woman's experience during a time when certain treatments were denounced

By Christy Prais



Christy Prais is the founder and host of the YouTube channel *Discovering True Health*. Prais also serves on the advisory board of the *Fostering Care Healing School*.

I WAS ONE of the first 25,000 known COVID-19 cases in the United States in early March 2020 and was lucky enough to find a doctor who thought outside the box. He successfully treated me—possibly saving my life—against the guidance of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

As I was the first adult COVID-19 case my doctor—a pediatrician—had treated, he documented my progress and submitted his findings to the CDC, the World Health Organization (WHO), and a network of 26,000 doctors. He also shared them in a Facebook post.

What transpired next was an attack by doctors in his own network. Additionally, the post outlining his treatment was censored and deleted by Facebook, and the CDC and the WHO ignored his findings.

Despite the backlash, my doctor went on to successfully treat hundreds of adults with COVID-19, seeing more than 40 a day for three months at one point during the pandemic. He’s one of the many unsung heroes of the COVID-19 pandemic.

During my recovery over the following months, I watched reports of hundreds of thousands of people dying from COVID-19 while the CDC continued to strongly recommend that people not take the medications I credit for helping to save my life. Sadly, three years into the pandemic, they still are ignored or rejected by the major health agencies.

Unfortunately, many doctors who have shared COVID-19 treatment protocols that differ from the CDC have lost their livelihoods. Because of this, my doctor wishes not to be named in this article; he would like to continue to save lives in peace. I will call refer to him as Dr. Wes to respect his wishes.

My COVID-19 Timeline

As a child, I suffered from severe asthma, but the severity of my condition diminished and became mild in my adult years. I was 41 and in excellent physical and cardiovascular health at the time of contracting COVID-19 in early 2020. Here is a brief timeline of my illness progression:

DAY 3 AFTER EXPOSURE: I had mild sinus infection symptoms. A telemedicine doctor prescribed azithromycin, also known as Z-Pak, and prednisone, but refused to issue a COVID-19 test due to a lack of respiratory symptoms. (At that time, COVID-19 testing was only obtained through a doctor’s referral.)

DAY 5: My symptoms worsened and included severe headache, sinuses completely inflamed, body aches, low energy, and a heavy feeling in the lungs when breathing. No fever. I finally got a COVID-19 test at one of the first drive-thru sites.

DAY 7: My symptoms worsened, but I still had no fever. I was contacted by a disease investigation and intervention specialist with the state health department who confirmed the result of the COVID-19 test as positive. I was told to stay home unless I needed to go to the hospital. No additional treatment advice was given.

DAY 10: I completed my prescribed run of azithromycin and prednisone. Breathing was more difficult; I still had no fever. I started nebulizer treatments of albuterol (I had these on hand from a previous bronchitis bout). No improvement from medication.

DAY 12: My symptoms worsened, with severe burning in my feet and dizziness. My lungs started to feel like they were failing, and it felt like I was suffocating or drowning. I contacted urgent care and asked for a prescription for hydroxychloroquine, but they refused. I was told by the nurse that they were only prescribing it to those who were dying. I mentioned I would probably be close to dying in a few days and that it would be great if we could avoid getting to that point. They still refused but finally agreed to prescribe a steroid inhalant, budesonide. The budesonide and albuterol inhal-

ant only gave me a four-hour window of minor ease of breathing. My lungs were still worsening.

I contacted Dr. Wes, a pediatrician recommended by a friend. He told me to go to the hospital for a chest X-ray, treatment, and a prescription for more racemic epinephrine.

The hospital refused to give me the prescription. The doctor said I couldn’t breathe well because I had COVID-19 and all they could do was intubate me once I was worse. I went home.

Wes wrote me the prescription so I could start on three treatments daily of racemic epinephrine as well as budesonide and albuterol.

DAY 14: My breathing began to stabilize.

DAY 19: My throat swelled shut, so I rushed to Wes’s office. He diagnosed me with a secondary bacterial infection. I still had no fever.

Doctor’s PSA

The remainder of my treatment journey is outlined below in a censored and deleted Facebook post that Wes posted on Nov. 11, 2020, after successfully treating hundreds more adults with COVID-19. Many were elderly with underlying conditions.

His post was his attempt to help save more lives after the CDC, WHO, and the doctors network failed to acknowledge this treatment’s success. It was also a warning that inflammation and secondary bacterial infections were major contributors to mortality from the COVID-19 virus. A few deletions have been made to protect his identity:

“First of all, Happy Veterans Day and thank you to all of those who have served our country.

“I am often asked about the treatments I am using with my COVID-19 patients, so I thought I would begin with my adult case zero, the first adult patient that I inherited. The first adult I treated with COVID-19 early in the pandemic was a 41-year-old asthmatic female. ... She was in excellent physical and cardiovascular health at the time of contracting the illness.

“March 12, 2012: Felt like she had a sinus infection (few, if any of the approx. 80 adults I have treated had a fever at the start of COVID). ...

“March 24, 2020: Patient reported she

couldn’t breathe so I referred her to the [emergency room]. ER said to come back when she couldn’t breathe at all. Started on azithromycin. Already on albuterol and budesonide breathing treatments.

“March 24, 2020: Added racemic epinephrine breathing treatments.

“March 26, 2020: The patient reported to me that she felt like the racemic epinephrine stabilized her lungs and was the first time her breathing improved.

“March 31, 2020: We clinically diagnosed her with a secondary bacterial infection. I felt like she might not make it if I kept following the guidelines at the time, so I asked her if she wanted me to ... treat her the same way I treated every severe pediatric Coronavirus patient for 17 years, or I could continue to follow the current [CDC] guidelines and we could hope for the best.

“That night, a doctor friend she knew told her, ‘[Dr. Wes] is going to kill you.’ She was very intelligent and asked the doctor how many COVID-19 patients he treated to which he replied, ‘Zero.’

“March 31, 2020: Ceftriaxone 1 gm daily shots were begun for five days, Dexamethasone 8 mg daily shots were begun for five days. After the second day of shots, she finally felt like her lungs began “purging” all the fluid. Continued to alternate

Bacterial coinfections were a major cause of death in previous pandemics such as those of H1N1 influenza in 2009, SARS in 2003, and the Spanish flu in 1918.

racemic epinephrine, Albuterol, and Budesonide breathing treatments daily.

“First week of April: Repeated shot regimen—Ceftriaxone 1 gm daily shots x 4 or 5 days, Dexamethasone shots 8 mg daily for 4 or five days.

“After the shots were completed: Patient finally felt like she could breathe again, but continued to have fatigue and exercise intolerance, but was no longer at risk from COVID-19.

“Every physician should consider their own clinical judgment and guidelines when deciding how to treat COVID-19 patients and this is not meant to criticize the current guidelines nor any other physician’s treatment of their patients.”

How COVID-19 Kills

When the SARS-CoV-2 virus invades the body, it can cause an imbalance in the immune system that can prove fatal.

“What ‘kills’ COVID-19 patients is dysregulated systemic inflammation,” the

authors of a commentary published in *Critical Care Explorations* wrote in April 2020.

This dysregulation can cause a “cytokine storm,” a severe life-threatening condition, also known as cytokine release syndrome (CRS).

Another study published in *Mediators of Inflammation* in January 2022 states, “What relentlessly takes the patient’s life is the overactive immune response induced by SARS-CoV-2 virus infection.”

Inflammation is normally a beneficial response of our immune system to fight off infection and help us heal.

A CRS is a life-threatening inflammatory response caused by an overproduction of cytokines, which are proteins that regulate the body’s immune response. This inflammation causes the immune system to mistakenly attack the body’s own cells and tissues.

Patients with mild CRS mainly show nonspecific clinical symptoms such as fever, rash, fatigue, anorexia, diarrhea, joint pain, headache, myalgia, and neuropsychiatric symptoms. More severe cases can cause severe lung damage, cardiovascular symptoms, hematologic symptoms, acute kidney injury, and multiple organ failure.

CRS leads to abnormalities such as acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), which may lead to respiratory failure—the leading cause of death in those suffering from COVID-19.

Dr. Roger Seheult, who is quadruple board-certified in internal medicine, pulmonary diseases, critical care medicine, and sleep medicine through the American Board of Internal Medicine, breaks down this process in a 2020 medical lecture.

He says the lungs become inflamed due to the cytokine storm. A leakage of fluids into the interstitial space between the alveoli and capillaries, and into the alveoli themselves, blocks oxygen from getting into the bloodstream and causes the entire body to ❖



The Emergency Operations Center at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta on March 19, 2021. Many doctors who have shared COVID-19 treatment protocols that differ from the CDC’s have lost their livelihoods, says journalist Christy Prais.

FROM L. COURTESY CHRISTY PRAIS; ERIC BARADAT/FPV VARIETY IMAGES

CRS leads to abnormalities such as acute respiratory distress syndrome. Respiratory failure due to ARDS is the leading cause of death from COVID-19.

become hypoxic (deprived of oxygen).

This creates a feeling of heaviness and difficulty breathing, or as I describe it, a feeling of drowning or suffocating on the fluid in the lungs.

Immune dysregulation and the abnormal inflammatory response of a CRS causes widespread tissue injury and can lead to bacterial growth and infections.

More recently, a study published in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health found “higher mortality rates were associated with patients in the coinfection group compared to the SARS-CoV-2-only infected group (50% vs. 18.7%, respectively).” In other words, patients who had COVID-19 and a bacterial co-infection were far more likely to die.

A study published in BCM Infectious Diseases in March 2022 found that 68 percent of the 94 patients in the study acquired at least one of the studied secondary bacterial infections during their ICU stay. Almost two-thirds of patients (62 percent) acquired secondary pneumonia.

“This study confirms that the incidence of secondary bacterial infections in critically ill patients infected with SARS-CoV-2 is very high,” the authors stated.

Another study that sought to analyze the death risk due to coinfections in 212 severely ill COVID-19 patients found that the mortality rate was 50.47 percent. Fungal or bacterial isolation occurred in 89 patients, of whom 83.14 percent died. Coinfected patients were hospitalized longer and had a higher risk of dying.

“The early diagnosis of coinfections is essential to identify high-risk patients and to determine the right interventions to reduce mortality,” the study states.

Published papers speculate that the current estimated percentage of people dying from COVID-19 secondary bacterial infection may be underestimated, as “few papers report the species identity or time of specimen collection, making it impossible to determine whether any

patients presented with bacterial infection at the time of hospital admission.”

Why the Protocol Saved My Life

My COVID-19 experience followed the same course laid out above. Wes aggressively treated the inflammation in my lungs and the secondary bacterial infection, allowing my body to heal. Here is a brief outline of the medications my doctor used:

1. Racemic epinephrine is a bronchodilator that quickly reduces inflammation. It helped reduce the fluid in my airways that was inhibiting the oxygenation of my blood. Bronchodilators are used when individuals have lower than optimal airflow through the lungs. They make breathing easier by relaxing the muscles in the lungs and widening the airways (bronchi).

Racemic epinephrine’s efficacy in the treatment of patients with inflammation of the larynx, trachea, and bronchi has been well-documented.

Racemic epinephrine also acts by narrowing the airway mucosa through stimulation of the alpha and beta-adrenergic receptors. This helps to reduce edema (build-up of fluid) in the lungs. Reducing edema can improve lung function by decreasing the pressure in the blood vessels, which prevents fluid from entering the air spaces (alveoli) in the lungs.

2. Ceftriaxone is an antibiotic used to treat bacterial infections, including those in the respiratory system, by killing bacteria or preventing their growth. It’s effective against bacteria that are resistant to other antibiotics.

3. Dexamethasone is a glucocorticoid that has an anti-inflammatory effect shown to prevent and suppress cytokine storm development in COVID-19 patients.

Studies show the effect of COVID-19 on the cardiovascular system is more severe in patients with elevated levels of

inflammatory factors such as interleukin (IL)-6. Dexamethasone significantly reduces the level of IL-6 and was the first drug shown to reduce mortality in COVID-19 patients.

Forgetting History’s Deadly Consequences

Viral infections of the respiratory tract have long been linked to the risk of secondary bacterial infections. Bacterial coinfections were considered a major cause of death in previous influenza pandemics.

During the outbreaks of SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) in 2003 and H1N1 influenza in 2009, bacterial complications were associated with serious outcomes such as death and admission to intensive care.

Upward of 95 percent mortality was directly attributable to secondary bacterial pneumonia in the 1918 Spanish flu.

In a 2008 news release titled “Implications for Future Pandemic Planning,” researchers from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases stated:

“The majority of deaths during the influenza pandemic of 1918-1919 were not caused by the influenza virus acting alone. ... Instead, most victims succumbed to bacterial pneumonia following influenza virus infection. The pneumonia was caused when bacteria that normally inhabit the nose and throat invaded the lungs along a pathway created when the virus destroyed the cells that line the bronchial tubes and lungs.

“Pathologists of the time ... were nearly unanimous in the conviction that deaths were not caused directly by the then-unknown influenza virus but rather resulted from severe secondary pneumonia caused by various bacteria. Absent the secondary bacterial infections, many patients might have survived, experts at the time believed.

“A future influenza pandemic may unfold in a similar manner.

“Preparations for diagnosing, treating, and preventing bacterial pneumonia should be among highest priorities in influenza pandemic planning.”

Dr. Anthony Fauci is quoted in the release as saying, “We are encouraged by the fact that pandemic planners are already considering and implementing ♦♦



A paramedic loads a cleaned stretcher into the back of an ambulance before heading out for another call during the pandemic, in Stamford, Conn., on April 2, 2020.

PHOTO BY JOHN MOORE/GETTY IMAGES

some of these actions.”

Research has now found that secondary bacterial infections in COVID-19 patients are a stronger predictor for death compared to in influenza patients. A study published in *Nature* in June 2021 found that in-hospital deaths from pulmonary secondary bacterial infection were two times more prevalent in COVID-19 patients than in influenza patients.

Questioning the Ethics of CDC and WHO

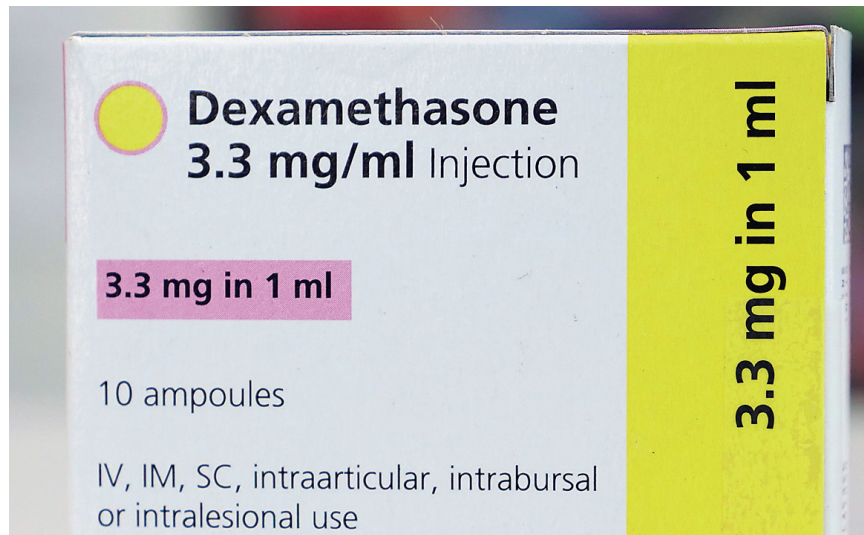
On Feb. 4, 2020, the Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness Act was implemented, granting immunity to individuals working to combat the pandemic (except in cases of willful misconduct) from liability claims that may arise from the use or administration of covered countermeasures. These include COVID-19 tests, vaccines, and any approved drugs or therapeutics to treat the disease.

On Feb. 15, 2020, a commentary regarding the use of corticosteroids (CST) for COVID-19, coauthored by a member of the WHO panel on clinical management, stated there were “conclusive data” to suggest that patients with COVID-19 ARDS don’t benefit from corticosteroids. This resulted in the WHO and CDC COVID-19 treatment protocols recommending against corticosteroids, including dexamethasone.

A commentary written by several doctors and published in the *Society of Critical Care Medicine* in April 2020 criticized this interpretation and called it “biased and without evidence-based support.”

They stated, “There is no justification based on available evidence and professional ethics to categorically deny the use of CST in severe life-threatening ‘cytokine storm’ associated with COVID-19.”

They argue that the “conclusive” statement rested on only four small studies



A box of dexamethasone injection ampoules at a pharmacy in London on June 16, 2020.

without including results from another 25 publications, disregarded the results of two major studies (on 5,327 SARS and 2,141 H1N1 patients) showing significant reductions in mortality, and a SARS study that found CST was safe and reduced death risk by 47 percent.

As of Dec. 28, 2022, the CDC COVID-19 guidelines still recommend against the use of dexamethasone or other systemic corticosteroids in the absence of another indication. They list preferred therapies such as Paxlovid, remdesivir, and molnupiravir, and there is no mention of treatment for cytokine storm-induced inflammation or secondary bacterial infections.

The Importance of Early Treatment

My battle with COVID-19 left me with severe lung damage, microvascular damage, and what we now call long-COVID, which severely impacted my life for almost two years.

My doctor stated that my case would not have been severe if I had been treated early on and with the right medications.

Dr. Pierre Cory, a critical care physi-

cian and one of the founding physicians of the Front Line COVID-19 Critical Care Alliance has done extensive research on the early treatment and progression of COVID-19. His work shows that the first one to five days are crucial in the successful treatment of COVID-19.

In early July 2022, I was hit again with COVID-19. This time, it was much more severe from day one. I had a 102-degree fever, severe body aches, and difficulty breathing. My symptoms were getting worse by the day.

DAY 3: I started on Wes’s medication protocol. By that evening, most of my symptoms were gone.

DAY 4: I was given a Myers’ cocktail IV and ozone infusion.

DAY 6: I took NAC (N-acetylcysteine) supplements daily and had no more symptoms except for mild brain fog and fatigue, which disappeared within two weeks.

All my symptoms resolved within two weeks, and I experienced no long-COVID or ongoing lung issues.

I owe my life to Wes. Early in my treatment, he promised he wouldn’t let me die. He kept that promise. I am deeply grateful for him and for all the doctors that have refused medical tyranny and used their own clinical judgment and guidelines when deciding how to treat COVID-19 patients. ■

THIS PAGE: ARMAN SOLJIN/RFV/GETTY IMAGES

The first one to five days are crucial in the successful treatment of COVID-19, research shows.

Perspectives



The sun rises behind a tower supporting electrical lines in Suisun City, Calif., on Jan. 26, 2022.

PHOTO BY JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES



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INSIDE

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The FTC's Monopoly On Thought

Why does the agency need every private communication of Elon Musk?

THE FEDERAL TRADE Commission (FTC) was established with massive bipartisan support in 1914 to fight monopolies. But under the Biden administration, this powerful government agency has become something like a police force favoring the most dangerous form of monopoly: that which prevents competition in free expression.

Although there were differences on whether to regulate or force the breakup of large corporations, opposition to monopolies was a position shared by the nominees for president in 1912.

Woodrow Wilson's Democratic Party platform wanted "to make it impossible for a private monopoly to exist in the United States." William Howard Taft's Republican platform declared that "no part of the field of business opportunity may be restricted by monopoly"; and the new Progressive Party of former President Theodore Roosevelt, who came in second to Wilson and ahead of Taft that November, backed "the establishment of a strong federal administrative commission of high standing, which shall maintain permanent active supervision over industrial corporations engaged in interstate commerce."

Today, the FTC declares in its mission statement that it exists to "promote competition" as "the only federal agency that deals with consumer protection and competition issues in broad sectors of the economy." And it boasts that "every day, we pursue strong and effective law enforcement against deceptive, unfair, and anti-competitive business practices."

But when Tesla CEO Elon Musk executed his complicated and expensive purchase of Twitter, heralding the "de-woke-ification" of the social media giant, the FTC bullied the company, demanding to know the names of journalists with whom it was communicating. As House Judiciary

Chairman Jim Jordan (R-Ohio) and Senate Commerce Committee ranking member Ted Cruz (R-Texas) wrote in a joint letter to FTC Chairwoman Lina Khan, "The FTC's investigation of Twitter tracked public pressure from congressional Democrats and left-wing activists," including seven Senate Democrats suggesting civil penalties and financial liabilities for Twitter executives, and the liberal Open Markets Institute, for whom Khan had worked, calling on her to move against Twitter.

The agency has misused its consent decree enforcement to the extent of even trampling on the First Amendment's freedom of the press.

FTC attorneys demanded that Twitter provide the names of "all journalists and other members of the media" who were "granted any type of access to the company's internal communications ... Resources, internal documents, and/or files since Oct. 27, 2022." Jordan and Cruz are now asking Khan to provide a written explanation of why the FCC is making such a demand. The two members of Congress also seek all communications of FTC officials among themselves, with outside entities, with the White House, and with other executive branch agencies pertaining to its Twitter investigations.

In the aftermath of data breaches in 2009, Twitter entered into a consent decree with the FTC in 2011, which was expanded last year in regard to Musk's purchase. But the agency has misused its consent decree enforcement to the extent of even trampling on the First Amendment's freedom of the press.

The House Judiciary Committee's March 7 report on the FTC's abuse of its

powers against Musk's new acquisition described "an aggressive campaign to harass Twitter and deluge it with demands about its personnel decisions in each of the company's departments, every internal communication relating to Elon Musk, and even Twitter's interactions with journalists" with "no basis in the FTC's statutory mission." In more than a dozen letters to Twitter over the course of less than three months after Musk bought the company, the FTC made in excess of 350 detailed demands.

"The timing, scope, and frequency of the FTC's demands to Twitter," according to the report, "suggest a partisan motivation to its action."

For instance, why would the FTC need every internal communication "relating to Elon Musk" by any Twitter employee since his purchase of the firm, including those sent or received by Musk, whatever the subject matter? Why would the FTC need the identities of journalists engaging with Twitter to protect consumers?

It doesn't, of course. The FTC has joined the FBI as another politically suspect part of the federal government seeking to do the bidding of the ever-more radicalized Democratic Party. The new Twitter won't be suppressing New York Post stories on Hunter Biden's laptop and the Biden family's ties to China with Musk running the platform, nor will it be suspending the accounts of Republican politicians who violate leftist informational orthodoxy. And for the Washington "swamp," that isn't tolerable.

The breakup of that monopoly of thought within the dominant communications establishment threatens the left's hold on power, and so this agency established to smash monopolies is now betraying its founding principles and purpose for being, waging war in defense of a monopoly on our most valuable commodity: public discourse.

Anders Corr



China Fear Grips a Republican

US House Speaker McCarthy may flip-flop on Taiwan visit

TALK OF U.S. HOUSE Speaker Kevin McCarthy's caving to China by not making a trip to Taiwan, as he said in July he would "love to do," is a step backward for the United States and its partners in Asia.

McCarthy (R-Calif.) and Taiwan's president, Tsai Ing-wen, announced a meeting in the United States, which is good, but is causing speculation that they will backtrack on the precedent set by former Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), when she visited the island democracy in August and "set a new status quo."

After reports of McCarthy's plans to visit Taiwan as early as within the next couple of months, Beijing warned against official interactions with the country. Now, Beijing's threats appear to be pushing McCarthy to moderate his enthusiasm.

Pelosi's visit was followed by a massive uptick in Chinese cyber, air force, and naval activity around the island, which amounted to a blockade exercise. Beijing launched ballistic missiles over Taiwan and canceled eight dialogues with the United States, including on military, climate, and counternarcotics issues.

Among the suspended talks were those on combating the overdose crisis, which killed 107,000 Americans in 2021. Most of those deaths can be traced to illegal fentanyl and its precursors, trafficked from China through Mexico.

Tsai's administration reportedly provided intelligence to McCarthy about the increased threat from China that could result from his visit, which along with his office's failure to publicly confirm his plans, suggests that he's in the process of a flip-flop.

The Financial Times reported on March 8 that Tsai "has convinced U.S. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy to

meet in California rather than Taipei to avoid an aggressive Chinese military response, as tensions run high between Beijing and Washington."

Taiwan's defense minister warned on March 6 that the Chinese military was "looking for pretexts like foreign senior officials visiting" to escalate its aggression, including the risk of "sudden entry" just 24 nautical miles off Taiwan's coast.

If McCarthy fails to visit Taiwan, in contrast to Pelosi, Beijing's bullying strategy of military buildup, diplomatic retaliation, threats, and incrementalism would win the day.

The Financial Times cited Taiwanese officials, one of whom said, "There might be policies even more irrational than in the past emanating from Beijing. If we can try to control this together, the risks it brings for everybody can be contained better."

One official defended Tsai's trip to the United States, which could similarly increase the risk from Beijing, by noting that the risk must be managed, but that "pushing the status quo backward is not the way."

If McCarthy fails to visit Taiwan, in contrast to Pelosi, the status quo would indeed be pushed backward. Beijing's bullying strategy of military buildup, diplomatic retaliation, threats, and incrementalism would win the day.

Although McCarthy's office claimed that his visit with Tsai in the United States wouldn't affect his plans one way or another to visit Taipei, his failure to reaffirm those plans when asked appears to be a flip-flop.

This differs from the actions of Pelosi, who pushed forward with a visit in the teeth of military threats from Beijing, and President Joe Biden, who has said on four occasions that he would defend Taiwan militarily from an invasion by China.

One would think Republicans are measurably tougher, not weaker, on China than Democrats. Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-Wis.), for example, is keeping to the right of his Democratic colleagues on the new House committee on competition with the regime in China.

China is attempting to force the United States and its partners out of Asia so that Xi Jinping can realize his "China Dream" of first regional, and then global, hegemony.

It appears to be paying dividends as the balance of power shifts to Beijing from Washington. The United States is weakening, because of a national debt of more than \$31 trillion, costly U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and now aiding Ukraine, and large-scale deaths in the United States attributable to the pandemic and the fentanyl crisis.

That the United States has retreated from Taiwan diplomatically and militarily since the 1970s, along with Beijing's increasing belligerence toward the island, which could be invaded as early as this year, are measurable indicators of the United States' loss of power relative to China. McCarthy's Taiwan waffle is the latest retreat.

We need a new strategy to roll back China and return Taiwan to the ensured independence that every democracy deserves. If Beijing succeeds, it could use Taiwan, including its computer chip industry and strong economy, to strengthen China against us.

To defend ourselves, we need to strengthen our economic and military power, and that of our allies, to the point that Taiwan is fully secure from attack. Then, perhaps Speaker McCarthy wouldn't be so scared to visit.

Weakening Electric Grid

The nation's electric grid has become less reliable, more fragile



AS MORE AND MORE irritated customers become certain that power shortages and blackouts have become more common, the electric grid's problems receive more attention. They should. Shortages and blackouts have in fact become much more common than they once were. The electric power grid has become increasingly fragile and considerably less reliable. This is especially troubling because, at the same time, Washington and several states plan to burden it further with electric cars and an increase in the use of electric appliances. In part, the power problem reflects the increased reliance on inherently intermittent wind and solar sources. But this straightforward fact of life is only part of the story behind the electric grid's problems. Matters are much more complicated.

Evidence of failure is irrefutable and has sometimes appeared with great drama. A 2021 cold snap in Texas, for example, led to widespread blackouts and the deaths of 250 people. California has for years regularly imposed rolling brownouts and blackouts on utility customers. Just this past Christmas season, unusually cold weather across the country prompted utilities from Massachusetts and New York across the Midwest and into the South to beg their customers to turn down their thermostats and delay their use of appliances. Millions lost power for days in North Carolina and Tennessee. Downed power lines caused some of the problems, but in many cases, electric utilities simply had to cut off power to some in order to avoid a total crash of their systems. The incidence of prolonged blackouts has doubled since 2013.

The green lobby, predictably,

blames the problem on how climate change has created more severe weather. The fossil fuel industry and its allies in Congress, equally predictably, blame the problem on the unreliability of wind and solar. No doubt there's truth on both sides, although many of these points are debatable. However, one point isn't: The wind doesn't always blow, and the sun doesn't always shine. Even in the face of this reality, these problems would seem to be something engineers could find solutions to and investors could then implement. But there's a complication, because most of the country uses regional transmission organizations (RTOs) to buy and sell power.

But this straightforward fact of life is only part of the story behind the electric grid's problems. Matters are much more complicated.

RTOs are a relatively new entrant in Americans' electric power equation. Before they were authorized by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission in 1999, huge regional utilities managed the nation's electric grid. Regulated monopolies owned all the parts of the process—from the generating equipment to the fuels used to power them to the transmission lines and the wires that led into customers' homes. Regulators controlled pricing to allow these firms enough surplus to maintain and upgrade facilities and return a reasonable profit to their shareholders. RTOs changed things radically.

Now, for most of the country, these regional bodies buy power from anywhere they can get it at the lowest price they can get. When the wind

blows and the sun shines, wind and solar charge the lowest prices, not least because the federal government and several state governments subsidize their operations. During those times, wind and solar crowd other fuel sources—fossil fuel and nuclear—out of the competition. But when the wind isn't so strong and cloud cover obscures the sun's rays, the RTOs look to other fuels. That sudden rise in demand necessitates a quick scaling up by fossil fuel and nuclear providers. But fossil fuel and nuclear produce are best and at the best price when they supply on a steady basis. Scaling up is difficult and can't always happen as quickly as demands change. What's more, the on-again-off-again nature of demand puts an added strain on generating and transmission infrastructure.

During the past 20-something years during which these arrangements have been in place, a lot of fossil fuel and nuclear has closed, not because of green preferences but because they simply could no longer operate profitably. The electric grid's infrastructure has deteriorated under the on-again-off-again strains and because providers lack the surplus to upgrade their equipment. At the same time, the reliance on natural gas has grown, because it has become more plentiful and seems able to respond more flexibly to variations in demand than can other fuels. It's hardly surprising, then, that natural gas use has risen in tandem with wind and solar preferences.

The upshot is an increasingly inadequate electric power grid, one that's less flexible, less resilient, and more prone to breakdowns than it once was. Worse yet, the political class in Washington and some states seems to have little interest in the problem, even as it makes plans to place still more burdens on this weakening grid.

Powell: Fed Isn't a Climate Policymaker

The central bank is studying climate change's economic effects since 2020



FEDERAL RESERVE Chair Jerome Powell told lawmakers during a congressional hearing on March 7 that the U.S. central bank isn't a climate policymaker, reiterating comments about the central bank's role in the environment.

Republicans, however, are concerned that the Fed could incrementally make climate a component of its policymaking tools and aims.

Michael Barr, the Fed's vice chair of supervision, revealed details of a pilot program in January that would direct the nation's six largest banks to disclose the effects that climate change could have on their operations. The review would show how financial institutions' loan portfolios and commercial real estate holdings, particularly in the Northeast, could be affected by droughts, floods, hurricanes, and other extreme weather events.

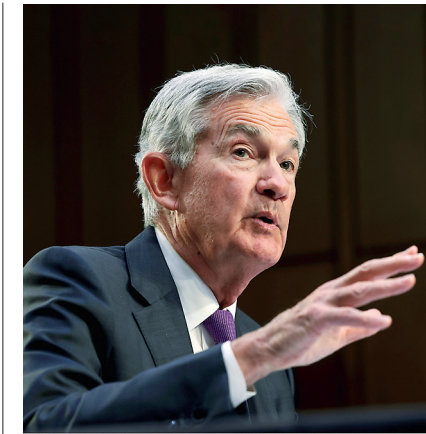
This has been about three years in the making, as the central bank first considered assessing the economic impacts of climate change in 2020.

During the hearing, several House Republicans used the opportunity to address the Fed's potential role in climate change policymaking.

House Financial Services Committee Chair Patrick McHenry (R-N.C.) stated in his opening remarks that the central bank's board is establishing the foundation for climate policy that would be “implemented through Fed regulation with an opening salvo of a ‘scenario analysis.’”

“As you've said, the Fed needs to ‘stick to our knitting.’ There is concern from many that the Fed is picking up new needles and knitting partisan sweaters,” he stated.

Rep. Frank Lucas (R-Okla.) also expressed concern that the Fed could be heading toward crafting policy re-



In recent years, Democrats have pushed the Fed to incorporate climate change risks into its policymaking framework.

lated to climate change. He alluded to the institution laying the groundwork for climate-related stress tests that might decrease access to capital for many sectors of the U.S. economy.

But that isn't the case, Powell insisted. “We are not looking to move into an area where we're actually becoming a climate policymaker,” he said.

“I would completely agree with you that over time that border needs to be very carefully guarded.”

Despite the latest efforts by the central bank, Powell has repeatedly vowed that the Fed wouldn't dictate climate policy, as this would be an issue left up to Congress.

“I feel strongly that climate change is an important issue that needs to be addressed by elected people,” he said.

“We do have a narrow role, and that role will be around making sure that banks understand and can manage the risks that they're running, and that's going to be it.”

This mirrors what Powell stated at a summit in Stockholm, Sweden, earlier this year that the Fed must “stick to our statutory goals and authorities” and “resist the temptation to broaden our scope to address other important social issues of the day.”

In recent years, Democrats have pushed the Fed to incorporate climate change risks into its policymaking framework.

In August 2020, the Senate Democrats' Special Committee on the Climate Crisis issued a report that the Fed needs to join the global Network for Greening the Financial System. This initiative, which includes some of the world's largest central banks, aims to assist the financial sector in mitigating climate change risks.

“Climate change remains the biggest threat on the horizon, and the current fragility of the financial system increases the likelihood that climate risks will spark a systemic crisis,” the report stated. “Managing climate risks is a natural extension of the Fed's core responsibility to ensure a stable and efficient financial system.”

The San Francisco Fed Bank asserted that climate change affects its three core roles: conducting monetary policy, regulating and supervising the banking system, and ensuring a safe-and-sound payment system.

“The Federal Reserve's job is to promote a healthy, stable economy. This requires us to consider current and future risks—whether we have a direct influence on them or not. Climate change is one of those risks,” the regional district bank wrote.

Powell conceded during the latest hearing that he accepts some lawmakers' “slippery slope” fears, but he assured Congress that the central bank would stay with its “narrow” role as long as he is Fed chair.

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



Energy-Induced Inflation

Governments can't blame inflation on Putin's war anymore

AT THE END OF FEBRUARY, the prices of oil (West Texas Intermediate and Brent), Henry Hub and ICE natural gas, aluminum, copper, steel, corn, and wheat, and the Baltic Dry Index were below their year-earlier levels.

The supply chain index and the global supply and demand balance, published by Morgan Stanley, had declined to September 2022 levels.

However, the latest inflation readings are hugely concerning. Considering the previously mentioned prices of commodities and freights, if inflation was a “cost-push” phenomenon, it would have collapsed to 2 percent levels already. However, both headline and core inflation measures, from the consumer price index (CPI) to personal consumer expenditure (PCE) prices, show extremely elevated levels and rising core inflationary pressures.

I've mentioned numerous times that there's no such thing as “cost-push” inflation. It's only more units of currency going to relatively scarce goods and services.

The monetary aspect of inflation has been proven on the way up and in the commodity correction. The Federal Reserve rate increases have deflated the price of commodities despite rising geopolitical tensions, supply challenges, and robust demand growth. Rate hikes make it more expensive to store, take long positions, and finance margin calls. Fed Chairman Jerome Powell offset the entire supply-demand tightness impact on prices.

Governments can't blame inflation on Putin's war or “supply chain disruptions” anymore. Printing money above demand is the only thing that makes prices rise in unison. If a price rises due to an exogenous reason but the quantity of currency remains



Printing money above demand is the only thing that makes prices rise in unison.

equal, all other prices don't rise. A PCE index of 5.4 percent in January 2023 with all the main commodities below the January 2022 level shows how high inflationary pressures are.

Inflation is accumulated, and the narrative is trying to convince us that bringing down inflation to 5 percent from 8 percent in 2024 will be a success. No. It will be a massive destruction of more than 20 percent of the purchasing power of citizens from inflation in the period.

Broad money growth was too aggressive in 2022, and it may take some time to ease the inflationary pressures to a level that doesn't make citizens even poorer.

Two recent papers published by the Bank for International Settlements remind us that money growth was the main culprit for the inflation surge. Claudio Borio, Boris Hoffmann, and Egon Zakrajsek conclude that “a link can also be seen in the recent possible transition from a low- to a high-inflation regime. An upsurge in money growth preceded

the inflation flare-up, and countries with stronger money growth saw markedly higher inflation. Looking at money growth would have helped to improve post-pandemic inflation forecasts, suggesting that its information value may have been neglected.”

Ricardo Reis wrote: “Inflation rose because central banks allowed it to rise. Rather than highlighting isolated mistakes in judgment, [here I point] instead to underlying forces that created a tolerance for inflation that persisted even after the deviation from target became large.”

The supply chain and Ukraine war excuse has vanished, but inflation remains too high. Many market participants want rate cuts and money supply growth to see higher markets, with multiple and valuation expansion. However, rate cuts are very unlikely in this scenario, and central banks know they've caused a problem that will take more time than expected to correct.

Governments can't expect inflation to correct when public spending is rising, which means higher consumption of new monetary units via deficit and debt.

Citizens are suffering these inflationary pressures via a weakening real wage growth added to a much higher cost of living as the prices of nonreplaceable goods and services—education, health care, rents, and essential purchases—are rising much faster than the headline CPI suggests.

We're all poorer, and a slightly lower headline CPI doesn't mean lower prices, just a slower pace of destruction of the purchasing power of currencies.

Someone will invent another excuse to blame inflation on anything except the only thing that causes prices to rise at the same time: printing currency well above demand.

LEAHMILLS/REUTERS/FILE PHOTO

FANYU is an expert in finance and economics and has contributed analyses on China's economy since 2015.

Fan Yu

High Cost of Stock Compensation

Stock-based compensation increased dramatically in recent years

TECHNOLOGY INVESTORS had a rough year in 2022. The Nasdaq Composite Index went down by about 33 percent.

Despite a rebound so far this year, investors are faced with lower revenue growth and a significant structural hurdle—consequences of increasingly higher stock-based compensation awards.

This isn't a new phenomenon. Technology firms have been gifting lucrative stock and option grants to attract talent. And for a long period of time, investors ignored them. Stock prices went up year after year. There was no need to dive into esoteric financial statement reconciliations.

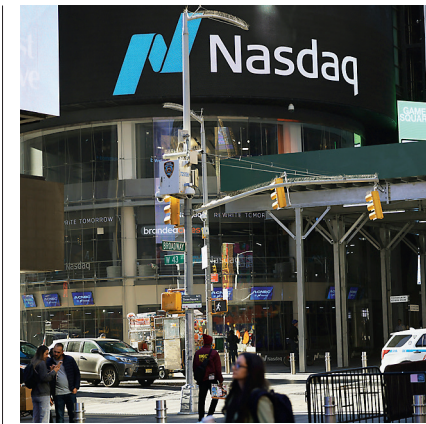
But this is no longer 2018. Higher interest rates mean high discount rates in valuation models, and the technology companies' future cash flows are no longer worth as much on a present value basis. The meager valuations must now be divided among more share units.

It's called dilution, and it's no longer just a concern of corporate finance analysts.

The dilution effect from years of handing out stock awards will negatively affect share performance going forward, according to a column in the financial magazine Barron's.

Let's summarize what happens when companies issue stock to employees. There are generally two types of compensation. First is cash compensation, paid in the form of a base salary and various kinds of bonuses. The second is stock, in the form of stock awards or stock options. In theory, there's alignment with shareholders by pegging compensation to future stock performance.

Stock awards are considered a non-cash expense, and accounting rules allow them to be amortized over a number of vesting years in a company's financial statements to mitigate



Tech firms utilize stock awards to attract and retain employees more than other sectors.

the annual impact. Most companies don't even include stock-based compensation in their non-GAAP adjusted results included in quarterly earnings presentations. It's a well-hidden expense and a clever way to artificially prop up the bottom line.

When stock awards vest, the new shares are issued, and they increase the number of shares outstanding. In other words, more shares are created, and existing shareholders keep less of the pie.

What this means is that unless a company's earnings are growing at a higher pace than dilution, each share of stock is theoretically worth less than before.

To be clear, this isn't just a compensation tactic practiced by tech firms. But tech firms on average use this type of compensation to attract and retain employees more than other sectors.

For many years, revenues grew rapidly and share prices increased accordingly. This enriched both employees at these technology companies and their shareholders.

And over the past decade, this trend has become an ever larger part of companies' expense structures. One study found that the average stock-based compensation amounted to just 4.2 percent of revenues a decade ago for the technology sector. This ratio increased to 10.5 percent in 2020 and then skyrocketed to 22.5 percent in 2021. Full data for 2022 aren't yet available, but this trend is expected to increase even further.

Close to 25 percent of a given company's revenue is an expense that's largely hidden from view. That's an alarming metric, especially in a period of declining revenue growth.

For the 2022 cycle, those awards will turn into an even higher number of shares when they're granted, meaning that the rate of dilution is going to be even higher.

Here's why: Stock awards are based on a dollar value. To keep it simple, suppose an employee receives \$100,000 in stock award in any given year. When the stock is trading at \$100 per share, the employee receives 1,000 shares. Now, suppose at the end of 2022 the company's stock price had tumbled to \$70. That same \$100,000 award at the end of last year translated to almost 1,430 shares handed to the employee.

If you're an outside investor of this company, you'll be subject to a much higher rate of dilution today.

Security software company Okta, big data platform company Confluent, and cloud computing firm Snowflake were among the companies that handed out the large stock grants as a percentage of revenues last year.

Of course, a higher proportion of employee stock grants alone isn't a reason to shun a company's stock. But astute investors should pay close attention to how a company reports its earnings in these times of heightened volatility.

Aaron Siri,
managing partner of
Siri & Glimstad.



THOUGHT LEADERS

Vaccine Makers, Immune From Liability

*Aaron Siri talks about taking on Big Pharma,
the most protected industry in America*

“IF THE PRODUCT IS SAFE,” asks Aaron Siri, “why does the manufacturer need blanket immunity to liability for injuries the product causes?”

In a recent episode of “American Thought Leaders,” host Jan Jekielek and Siri discussed vaccine manufacturers and their unprecedented protections from liability for injuries and even death caused by their products. Siri, a managing partner at Siri & Glimstad, has led several high-profile lawsuits against vaccine manufacturers and federal health agencies since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

JAN JEKIELEK: You’re very serious about mandates of any foreign substance being put into someone’s body, and your firm has done a number of related court cases, most recently around the COVID-19 genetic vaccines. How did you get into this?

AARON SIRI: I was a commercial litigator for years. Somebody I had worked with contacted me and said, “I’m going to work for the Department of Justice. I’ve got a case where this nurse was seriously injured from a flu shot, and I can’t represent her, because I’d be conflicted.” It’s the Department of Justice that defends against lawsuits brought by people claiming a vaccine injury.

If you’re injured by a vaccine, you can’t sue the manufacturer, you have to sue the federal government, the secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, through the Vaccine Injury Compensation Program. He asked if I would be interested, and I took the case, and we ended up obtaining compensation. I’d taken on a number of related cases as well.

MR. JEKIELEK: So you’re suing the secretary of Health and Human Services?

“That act of immunity has set off the cascade of events we see today around these vaccines: how the public views them, how our health authorities treat them, and how pharma has been able to run amok.”

MR. SIRI: That was one of the first things I learned about vaccines. I was always told the vaccines are safe. If the product is safe, why does the manufacturer need blanket immunity to liability for injuries the product causes? If it’s safe, there shouldn’t be any injuries or there should be one in a million, as you often hear. So why did they get this immunity?

After the vaccine manufacturers asked Congress to give them this immunity, claiming that otherwise they would be forced to stop producing three routine children’s vaccines because of the liability costs, in 1986, Congress granted them immunity. Had Congress done nothing, and just let the market forces do what they do, would those vaccine manufacturers have gone out of business? No, they’re in the business to make money. They probably would have retooled and made a better, safer product.

But Congress gave them immunity, not only for those three vaccines, but for any future recommended childhood vaccines.

That act of immunity has set off the cascade of events we see today around these vaccines: how the public views them, how our health authorities treat them, and how pharma has been able to run amok.

MR. JEKIELEK: You’ve been involved in quite a few high-profile cases. One is

the V-safe lawsuit. What is that?

MR. SIRI: The core of our vaccine practice is the vaccine policy work. Most of that is done on behalf of the nonprofit Informed Consent Action Network. They asked us to get the data from the V-safe database. The V-safe database is what the CDC calls its premier safety system for COVID-19 vaccines. For decades, the CDC said that their VAERS [Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System] database was their premier database for assuring vaccine safety.

But just as the first COVID vaccine was about to be authorized in December 2020, the CDC and the FDA changed their tune, after lots of reports started coming into VAERS. They said there were issues with VAERS and rolled out V-safe.

In designing V-safe, the CDC offered a list of check-the-box options regarding the vaccine. One category asked questions of people: Did they need medical care? Did they miss school or work? Were they unable to perform normal daily duties? ICAN, my client, wanted to know at what rate people needed medical care after a COVID-19 vaccine.

We asked the CDC to provide that data, but it refused. As usual with our health agencies, despite their claims of transparency, we had to sue them in federal court to get the information. They finally capitulated—it

ILLUSTRATION BY THE EPOCH TIMES, JACK WANG/THE EPOCH TIMES

“If the product is safe, why does the manufacturer need blanket immunity to liability?”

took almost a year and a half—and provided the data.

We then saw why they didn’t want the public to have it, because it showed that 7.7 percent of V-safe users, out of a little over 10 million users, reported needing medical care after a COVID-19 vaccine. These 10 million users were the enthusiasts, the ones clamoring for the shot. Nobody was yet being mandated to get it. When 7.7 percent are reporting they needed medical care, it’s probably a good reflection of the full population that got the vaccine. Another 25 percent reported being unable to go to school or work and to perform normal daily activities. So 32 percent of folks reported having some issue.

What’s concerning here is the CDC transparency. During the year and a half they were hiding this data from the public while we fought to get it, they published over a dozen studies using V-safe data to assure the public these vaccines were safe. But those studies only included the first week of V-safe data reporting, of people needing medical care after the shot. And that rate was something like half a percent. But this idea that the first week is representative of safety, they know that’s not the case. For the first six weeks, for example, the numbers are way larger. They never disclosed this to the public.

By the way, COVID has made many people really look at vaccines for the first time. They saw the clinical trials, the coercion, the rollout, and how some of the science was being mucked with on natural immunity. They’re now paying attention. Scientists who take issue with these

products are getting on the media and being interviewed. But there were such scientists for many of the other vaccines. I know them.

MR. JEKIELEK: Are you telling me this has happened in the past, just on a smaller scale?

MR. SIRI: From my vantage point, what is happening with the COVID vaccine is little different from what has happened with other vaccines in the past. The difference is the public’s interest in this particular vaccine and the views of those not in lockstep with pharma and the health agencies.

MR. JEKIELEK: But presumably because you see a safety signal early on, you can stop the use of a product, which has happened before.

MR. SIRI: There are basically two ways you can assure product safety. The way you really assure it is letting class action and product liability attorneys sue the manufacturer if their product has a safety issue. With the vaccine manufacturers immune from legal action, you have taken away the primary way we can assure product safety in this country.

Regulatory oversight is the second way we assure safe products, but it’s far weaker in this case. The Department of Health and Human Services is the department under which you have the CDC, the FDA, the NIH, and a list of over 20 health agencies. That department is responsible for promoting vaccines, yet it’s also responsible for the safety of vaccines. Those two things are in conflict. You tell an

agency to promote this product, and then you tell them to ensure its safety. Finding any safety issue undermines the promotion function, leaving our health agencies in many ways hopelessly conflicted.

MR. JEKIELEK: Are you an anti-vaxxer?

MR. SIRI: We get labeled with that pejorative. But these groups out there are fighting for everybody, even those who don’t realize it. ICAN, the nonprofit we represent, isn’t looking to take a vaccine away from anybody. They’re not looking to pass laws that prevent you from getting shots. They’re fighting to assure your rights to informed consent and bodily integrity, and your right to say no.

It’s that ability to say no that is so critical, because it is the last stop on that train to protect you and your child from a product that you think might harm you or your child. If you can’t do that without being kicked out of school, thrown out of your job, or excluded from civil society, then you don’t really have the right to say no. And hopefully one day, we will recognize that these nonprofits were performing an incredible public service.

MR. JEKIELEK: A subcommittee on the weaponization of the federal government has been formed. If you had a wish list for this committee, what would that be?

MR. SIRI: First, that the federal government would stop coercing people to get medical products they don’t want. Second, that the government quit violating the First Amendment by trying to control the media and social media.

I hope we can return to appreciating and respecting those rights. That is my hope in 2023 for our country. ■

This interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.



A MUST-SEE DOCUMENTARY FROM THE EPOCH TIMES

‘THE FINAL WAR’: A FILM ABOUT THE REAL EXISTENTIAL THREAT TO THE UNITED STATES

It’s not climate change. It’s not raging inflation or even the national debt. The real threat to the United States and to the world is the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) 100-year plan to defeat America and establish world domination. There’s no urgency in the Mainstream Media. That’s why “THE FINAL WAR” had to be made. Anchored by senior investigative reporter Joshua Philipp, and one-and-a-half years in the making, “THE FINAL

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.

See the film. Know the danger. Be prepared. “THE FINAL WAR” is already underway.



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Choose to Overcome Challenges

Adopt a military leader attitude, never relenting despite the odds

By Jeff Minick



“EACH PERSON’S LIFE is a kind of battle,” the philosopher Epictetus wrote more than 2,000 years ago.

What was true then is true now. After all, what is life if not a series of challenges, even small ones? The baby has colic, Joe’s late for work, traffic on I-95 is backed up for miles, and it’s starting to snow. Oh, and the cat just peed on the new rug in the hallway.

So if life is a battlefield, as many have described it—and especially if we feel we’re losing the war—is it possible that history’s greatest military leaders might offer us some worthwhile advice? Let’s consider a few examples.

Hold the Line

“I propose to fight it out on this line if it takes all summer.”

So wrote Gen. Ulysses Grant as his army collided with Confederate forces in 1864 near Spotsylvania, Virginia. Unlike his predecessors, Grant had no intention of retreating from Gen. Robert Lee’s vaunted Army of Northern Virginia.

Next time your perseverance wilts in the face of adversity, repeat Grant’s famous line and see if it delivers some steel to your backbone; you may be surprised by the power of these words.

Move Forward

“The die is cast.”

So declared Julius Caesar before launching his troops across the Rubi-

con River and into battle for control of Rome. Indecision and debate were ended; the time had come for action.

Prudence is a virtue, but too much dithering leads to lost opportunities. Once you’ve decided on a course of action—“I’m going to march into that office and ask for a raise!”—stop the second-guessing and move forward.

The best-equipped army in the world is useless without esprit de corps.

Go On Daring

“L’audace, l’audace, toujours l’audace.”

This translates to audacity and daring—but not recklessness—can win battles.

The same holds true on the battlefields of life. That guy enamored with the bank teller who smiles when she sees him needs to gather up his courage and ask her out. The woman who wants to quit her day job and launch a catering business needs a good dose of l’audace.

Be Fit to Fight

Napoleon Bonaparte said, “An army marches on its stomach.”

Battles throughout history were lost because of a lack of food alone.

Staying fit is vital, with a healthy diet, adequate sleep, and exercise to stay in fighting trim. Ignoring the demands of the body imperils the mind and the spirit.

Boost Spirits

“Morale is to all other factors as four is to one.”

All great commanders have known that the best-equipped army in the world is useless without esprit de corps.

How’s morale in your workplace or at home? If the folks around you display about as much spirit as a stone, then it’s time to take a hand and lift up some hearts. Bring some cookies to the office. Throw a party for no reason whatsoever. Compliment a fellow employee on a job well done. Give your loved ones a hug, listen to their troubles, and bring them gifts at unexpected times.

Never Give Up

In World War I’s First Battle of the Marne, Gen. Ferdinand Foch reported: “Hard pressed on my right. My center is yielding. Impossible to maneuver. Situation excellent. I am attacking.” Foch’s troops stopped the German advance in its tracks.

From these generals, we learn never to give up, never to despair, and never to allow our struggles to break us. We may be defeated, but we must never allow ourselves to be conquered.

Let’s keep up the press and win the war. ■

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



A superyacht vacation is guaranteed to be incredible, but add in exploring Croatia and it becomes magical.

PHOTO BY RUDY BALASKO/SHUTTERSTOCK

A Croatian Superyacht Adventure 72

THIS SPRAWLING HOME

by Frank Lloyd Wright is uniquely located on a working 76-acre farm in California’s Central Valley. 70

INVENTED IN NEW ORLEANS

100 years ago by Henry C. Ramos, this refreshing frothy and floral cocktail is a perfect choice to make brunch more festive. 75

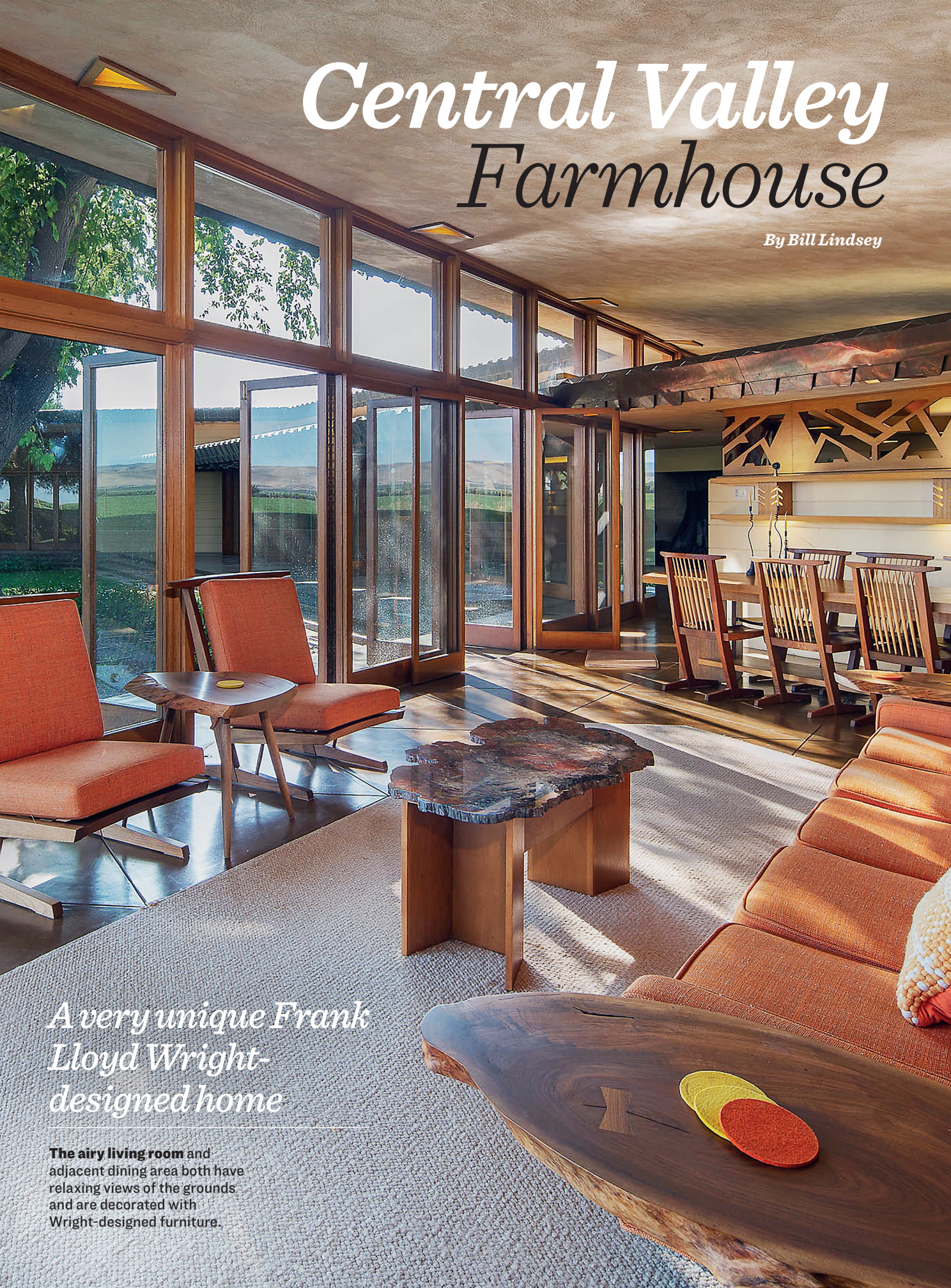
SPRING BREAK WAS

originally created for college kids, but there’s no reason adults can’t enjoy a well-behaved spring adventure, too. 76

INSIDE

Central Valley Farmhouse

By Bill Lindsey



A very unique Frank Lloyd Wright-designed home

The airy living room and adjacent dining area both have relaxing views of the grounds and are decorated with Wright-designed furniture.

DESIGNED BY FRANK LLOYD Wright in 1955, this unique home is situated on a 76-acre parcel in California's Central Valley. The 4,041-square-foot, seven-bedroom, six-bath residence was built in 1961 by Buck Fawcett, a college football star who enrolled in Wright's architecture courses at Stanford University in the 1940s.

The location is unusual for one of Wright's designs: a farm homesteaded by Fawcett's father to which Fawcett returned when his father's health declined, forsaking his selection by the Chicago Bears in the 1944 NFL draft.

The home was sold by the Fawcetts in 2012, at which time the new owners consulted with Wright's grandson, Eric Lloyd Wright, and completely renovated the residence and grounds. The home was subsequently awarded a 2019 Preservation Design Award by the California Preservation Foundation.

With privacy provided by means of a massive metal gate, the flat-roofed main residence showcases clean, elegant elements including a horizontal roofline and exterior concrete

blocks with copper accents. Generous use of expansive windows in the bedrooms and glass walls in the common areas provide a panoramic view of the property's pool and extensive landscaping, as well as the adjacent farm areas and the mountains in the distance.

The wood-lined interior features numerous examples of built-in and freestanding furniture designed by Wright. The living room is exceptionally airy, with an impressive 12-foot fireplace for chilly evenings adjacent to an integral seating area, plus recessed lighting, custom millwork, and a bank of horizontal windows above the walls of glass, which can be opened.

The kitchen is equipped with stainless steel appliances, a large food prep island, and oversized marble countertops. The home's bedrooms all have wood-and-marble-accented bathrooms, as well as unobstructed views afforded by large windows and glass walls that open for easy access to the pool, koi pond, Japanese garden, detached workshop, and guest quarters.

Located a two-hour drive from San Francisco, the bulk of the property's acreage is currently under lease to an alfalfa producer. ■



**CENTRAL VALLEY FARM
LOS BANOS,
CALIFORNIA
\$4.25 MILLION**

- 7 BEDROOMS
- 6 BATHS
- 4,041 SQUARE FEET
- 76 ACRES

KEY FEATURES

- FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT DESIGN
- WRIGHT-DESIGNED FURNITURE
- KOI POND, POOL, AND GUEST QUARTERS

AGENT

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(Above) Wright's signature interior and exterior design elements make this a very elegant yet family-friendly farmhouse. (Top Right) The home's warm, wood-paneled bedrooms feature large windows and glass walls that open to provide unobstructed views of and access to the pool and garden. (Right) The master bedroom's bathroom features a dual vanity, an oversized walk-in shower, tile flooring, and gleaming woodwork.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF CROSBY DOE



Croatia by Yacht

Enjoying the Mediterranean by superyacht isn't just for the rich and famous

By Janna Graber



The Ohana docked at Makarska, a small coastal town off the tourist track that is surrounded by towering hills.

PHOTO BY JANNA GRABER

IF YOU'VE NEVER BEEN TO CROATIA, you don't know what you've been missing—especially along the Dalmatian Coast.

Croatia's Dalmatian Coast has the sunshine, aquamarine seas, and Mediterranean climate of Greece, while its ancient cities such as Dubrovnik and Split reflect a rich Roman past.

From there, you'll head to the islands—Croatia has more than 1,200 of them—that dot the Dalmatian coastline. Life here revolves around the sea.

That's why yachting has become one of the most popular ways to explore Croatia. From small yachts for a family of eight to superyachts for up to 30, private-crewed charters are an accessible way to see Dalmatian Coast in your own timeframe.

I took a five-day cruise on the Ohana, a superyacht available for private charter by Goolets, a family-owned company with 700 luxury crewed-charter yachts to choose from.

Yacht charters are available at many price points—and when the cost is divided between family members or friends, they can be an accessible way to travel. The charter price for the Ohana is \$80,000 per week. If you divide that between a group of 30 of your family and friends, that's about the same cost per person as a luxury commercial cruise.

Onboard the Ohana

I joined a group of friends for our cruise on the Ohana. After flying into Split, Croatia, we boarded the 160-foot yacht. While it was a beautiful yacht already, it received an extensive renovation this year to make it even more luxurious, with 14 guest cabins, an onboard cinema, a children's playroom, and even a rock-climbing wall. This makes the Ohana a perfect yacht for families.

The Ohana was staffed by a talented culinary team who ensured we ate like kings. I enjoyed their innovative dishes, which included lots of fresh local seafood and Croatian wines. The caring staff onboard made sure that we had everything we needed to make the trip a memorable one.

Customized Cruise for You

The best part of a luxury yacht charter cruise is that the experience is crafted just for you and your group. Goolets works with each guest to design an experience tailored to their wishes. Once they understand what you want to see and do and what

Only around 48 of Croatia's 1,200 islands are inhabited.

CROATIA

Dalmatian Coast

Dubrovnik

Croatia is about a 5,328-mile flight from the United States.

Croatia's heart-shaped island, Galesnjak, is also known as the Island of Love.

A map of Marco Polo's travels in the 13th century. Some say that the famous explorer's birthplace was Korcula, Croatia.



FROM TOP: THE EPOCH TIMES; JANNA GRABER



The sun sets over the historic city center of Omis, a popular destination on the Dalmatian Coast.

kind of onboard experience you want, they'll customize a cruise just for you.

One thing I liked about our cruise was that we had the entire ship to ourselves. Chartered yachts offer a level of privacy and exclusivity that's hard to find on larger cruise ships or in hotels.

Being onboard was a fun experience on its own. The ship had lots of water toys, from snorkels to paddle boards to jet skis.

Destinations to Visit on the Dalmatian Coast

The highlight of any visit to the Dalmatian Coast is the wealth of destinations you can visit, from ancient coastal cities to hundreds of islands.

Dubrovnik isn't an island, but it's the top coastal destination in Croatia. It's a well-preserved ancient city that you might recognize from scenes in the TV show "Game of Thrones." Dubrovnik is known for its Old Town, which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The coastal town of Split also had a starring role in "Game of Thrones." Its well-kept Old Town is filled with winding cobblestone alleys, buzzing squares, and hundreds of small shops and restaurants. It has a lovely promenade that seems to be the center of life in Split. Many charter yacht cruises begin and end in Split.

One afternoon, we stopped at the small coastal town of Makarska. Fluffy clouds floated over the hills that tower over the town, giving an alpine feel to the region. Though it isn't on the tourist track, we were glad we had the

chance to visit. We spent the afternoon meandering through its winding streets and then having coffee at a café overlooking the bay.

Islands in Croatia

Hvar is the most popular island destination in Croatia. It's known for its picturesque old town, beautiful beaches, high-end restaurants, and lively nightlife. One of my favorite experiences was seeing its dramatic Hvar Fortress lit up at night.

The island of Brac is famous for Zlatni Rat beach. The beaches in Croatia are pebbly, but the water is a lovely clear blue. Brac is home to Vidova Gora, the highest peak in the Adriatic islands, which offers panoramic views of the island and the surrounding area.

Some say that the island of Korcula is the birthplace of Marco Polo. Wandering through its medieval Old Town, which is surrounded by walls and towers, it's easy to imagine those times.

The island of Vis is known for its beaches, charming villages, and crystal-clear waters. I recognized some parts of it from the movie "Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again."

I could have spent another week on the Ohana, but our cruise was over all too soon. I'm looking forward to going back. With more than 1,200 islands, there's much more in Croatia to explore. ■

Janna Graber has covered travel in more than 55 countries. She is the editor of three travel anthologies, including "A Pink Suitcase: 22 Tales of Women's Travel," and is the managing editor of Go World Travel Magazine.

If You Go

When to Visit:

The best time to visit is in the spring or fall, when the weather is pleasant and it's not crowded. In the fall, the ocean temperatures are warm enough to swim through the end of October.

Fly: To reach Croatia's Dalmatian Coast and the Ohana, I flew into Split.

Yachts: Goolets offers a wide variety of charter yachts and gulets. Learn more at Goolets.net.

Take Note: Be sure to try local specialties during your visit. Croatia has many vineyards, olive groves, and lavender fields.

THIS PAGE: MATKOVIC/SHUTTERSTOCK

ANATOMY OF A CLASSIC COCKTAIL: THE RAMOS GIN FIZZ

The New Orleans invention rewards a grueling arm workout with a light, frothy dream of a drink

By Kevin Revolinski

HERE'S A GIN FIZZ and then there's the Ramos gin fizz, a famous cocktail of the Big Easy.

The early "gin fiz" (only one "z," according to the 1887 edition of Jerry Thomas's "Bartenders Guide") called for one teaspoon powdered white sugar, three dashes lemon juice, one wine glass of Holland gin (genever), and a small piece of ice, shaken and served in a medium bar glass and topped with seltzer or sparkling mineral water for the fizzy part.

The Ramos gin fizz, on the other hand, is a riff on the original, created by bar owner Henry C. Ramos at his Imperial Cabinet Saloon in New Orleans in 1888.

A Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On

Ramos brought in more ingredients, such as egg white and cream, and required some pretty ample shaking, both for raising an eggy foam on top and preventing the cream from curdling in the citrus juices. Ramos was said to have employed 20 shaker boys who spent a requisite 12 minutes at their task.

Louisiana's legendary populist Gov. Huey Long used to actually travel with someone designated to personally shake his gin fizzes. Stop in at the bar at New Orleans's Southern

Orange flower water gives the drink a delicately floral aroma.



An egg white provides a lovely froth and silky mouthfeel, and softens the acidic bite of citrus.



A long, vigorous shaking pulls the drink together—and gives rise to its signature foamy cap.



The ingredients are gin, citrus, simple syrup, egg white, heavy cream, orange flower water, and club soda—but the process is the key.



RAMOS GIN FIZZ

2 ounces Old Tom or London dry gin
1/2 ounce lemon juice
1/2 ounce lime juice
3/4 ounce simple syrup
3 drops orange flower water
1 ounce cream
1 egg white
2 drops vanilla extract (optional)
2 ounces club soda

Add all ingredients except for the soda to a cocktail shaker.

Shake without ice until your arms fall off (or at least two to three minutes). Add ice and shake more until well chilled.

Strain into a Collins glass, adding the soda at the same time. Garnish with an orange slice.

Food and Beverage Museum and you can see a mechanical crank-and-shake device just for this purpose—built for the fun of it and based on a design from the early 20th century. The point is, this isn't just a 20-second chilling shake!

The original recipe was kept secret, and Prohibition surely didn't help anyone remember. But after the return of legal drinking, the Hotel Roosevelt acquired the rights to the drink's name from Ramos's son, and it remains a signature drink there.

A Note on Egg Whites

I use them all the time, daringly. Food safety experts will tell you that there's a risk with any raw eggs. Options, for those more cautious than I, are buying pasteurized eggs or pasteurizing them yourself with a sous vide method. But egg whites in cocktails provide not only a lovely froth, but also a silkier mouthfeel. They also soften the acidic bite of citrus. ■

Kevin Revolinski is an avid traveler, craft beer enthusiast, and home-cooking fan. He's based in Madison, Wis.

Even if it's been a while since college, consider a spring break adventure.



HOW TO PLAN A SPRING ADVENTURE

Spring is coming, so it's time to start planning the best vacation ever

By Bill Lindsey

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SPRING BREAK is an American tradition that became infamous for out-of-control parties, but it actually had a completely innocent beginning. Back in 1935, Colgate University's swim coach brought his team to Fort Lauderdale's Casino Pool for spring practice; sensing a tourist opportunity, the city began hosting an annual College Coaches' Swim Forum. When they heard from the athletes about this great little beach town, hordes of college students began what became an annual pilgrimage, and spring break was born.

Today, "spring break" takes place at beaches across the United States, the Bahamas, Mexico, and other destinations, but why should it be just for college kids? The idea of stepping aside from responsibilities for a few days and relaxing while enjoying new scenery is appealing to all ages. However, there are a few tricks to making an adult or family spring break vacation a rousing success.

The first issue is timing; scheduling a family vacation at the same destination and time when a crowd of college kids will be present is a recipe for disaster. A better plan is to pick a destination and then do some research to find dates when hordes of spring-breakers aren't likely to be present. It may also be possible to get a discounted rate by selecting dates after the college breaks have passed.

The following suggestions are by no means the only or best vacation ideas, but rather are intended to help develop a personal list of spring break vacations.

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Bucket List

A spring vacation is all about adventure, so consider starting with bucket list experiences, such as whitewater rafting, a tour of museums, relaxing on exotic beaches, a horseback adventure, a mountain bike tour, or even a cruise. The idea is to think outside the box, developing a plan for an unforgettable vacation.

One example that fits this description is a stay at an ice hotel—literally a hotel crafted of ice blocks. Although most ice hotels are located in Norway, Sweden, Finland, and other far-away locations, the Hôtel de Glace is in Quebec City, making it perhaps a bit of an easier destination. The rooms in this unique hotel are sculpted from ice blocks and are equipped with fireplaces, sturdy wooden doors, and beds also made of ice.

This is by no means a typical igloo; located in Village Vacances Valcartier alongside a wide variety of amusement park-style attractions, Hôtel de Glace features a restaurant and lounge. This is an adventure to be sure, but keep in mind that the unusual architecture precludes private bathroom facilities in the rooms. ➡



Take a road trip break on two-lane highways, exploring small towns and enjoying sights most folks never see.

Plenty of sunshine and snow make spring skiing in Colorado a great spring break adventure after the students have gone back to college.



Cruise ships are self-contained, mobile resort hotels, going from one fun port to another; shop for "after spring break" voyages for adults and families.



Make your spring break amazing by vacationing at Hotel De Glace, the only ice hotel in North America.





Make it a family spring break vacation by taking an RV to explore national parks and spend quality time with the kids.

Beach Vacation

The city of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, is more attractive to families now that it no longer officially invites vacationing students. But there are many other beach towns to choose from, ranging from Panama City Beach in Florida's Panhandle up to North Carolina's Myrtle Beach or all the way down to Cancún, Mexico. In order to have the best adult or family spring break experience, consider visiting either before students arrive or after they leave—contact local hotels to help find appropriate dates. Also ask about discounted rates, as some hotels and other lodging operators may have special deals to lure “regular” guests back.

Active Adventures

Those seeking a physically challenging vacation that also affords an up-close look at the scenery might enjoy a guided bike tour. There are many tour companies offering planned vacations across the United States; one option is USA Bike Tours, which has more than 140 trips to choose from, ranging from one to 20 days in length.

Road bikes, mountain bikes, and more sedate recreational bikes are on offer in order to accommodate riders of all experience levels and ages. Trips are available year-round, subject to weather conditions, which makes it

easy to find tours that aren't primarily made up of college students.

Spring skiing is another option, with resorts at Colorado's Crested Butte, Winter Park, and Vail, as well as others in Idaho, Montana, and Utah, all eager to attract families to their slopes, hotels, and restaurants.

Sail the Seas

Over the past several years, cruises have become a very popular venue for vacationing students, departing from traditional spring break cities including Florida's Miami and Fort Lauderdale, California's Long Beach, and Texas's Galveston and heading to towns and islands in Mexico and the Bahamas. Shore visits and shipboard activities are all part of the experience. Just as hotels seek to get back to the “regular” clientele after the students have left, cruise lines also need to keep the ships full year-round, often offering discounted fares or special deals designed to entice adults and families back on board.

Ultimately, the idea of spring break is to break free from the normal routine for a while, so regardless of choosing a beach vacation, a mountain biking adventure, or spring skiing, go when the college kids aren't there and find an adventure that will recharge and refresh you. ■



LIFESTYLE
NOT JUST FOR KIDS
Enjoy spring break after college



1

When to Go

Check for available dates either before or after the invasion of college kids; ask the hotel, cruise line, or other attraction if they offer adult or family discounted rates, and if so, for what dates.



2

Where to Go

Traditional spring break locations are beaches, but consider bucket list destinations and adventures, too, such as a mountain bike tour along the Pacific Coast Highway or a spring ski trip in Colorado.



3

Bring the Family

The kids can use a break, too, so look for destinations that will keep them entertained and occupied.

THIS PAGE FROM L: GROUND PICTURE/SHUTTERSTOCK; THEEPOCH TIMES



THE BEST BASKETBALL GEAR

Practice, either alone or with friends, is the best way to improve your basketball game. Here's a selection of gear chosen to help improve your skills.

By Bill Lindsey

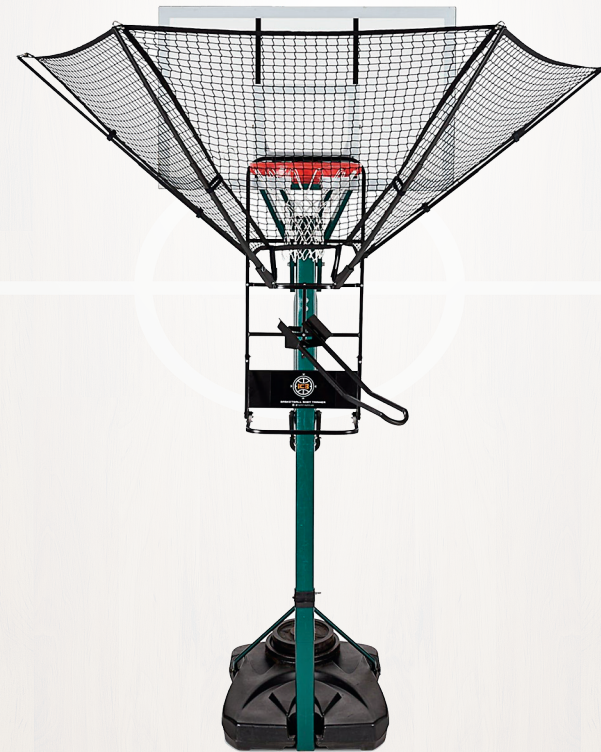
Protect Your Arms
2XU FORCE COMPRESSION ARM GUARDS

\$69.99
Basketball is a full-body workout, but while many players rightfully focus on wearing the right shoes, often it's the arms that take a beating after a lot of dribbling and taking shots. These compression sleeves use “muscle containment stamping” technology to help maintain a constant flow of blood while protecting tendon and fascia groups to mitigate fatigue and swelling.



Make Any Room a B-Ball Court
GOSPORTS WALL-MOUNTED BASKETBALL HOOP

\$59.99
Add this hoop to a basement, man cave, kid's bedroom, or even office break room onto wall studs or drywall, and you can practice shooting day or night, regardless of the weather. The kit includes two six-inch inflatable basketballs that are textured to feel like full-size ones, a hand pump, and an oversized 30-by-21-inch backboard that protects the wall from missed shots.



Drivin' on the Driveway
LIFETIME ADJUSTABLE PORTABLE BASKETBALL HOOP

\$579.99
There's no need to go to the local playground to practice when you have a hoop in the driveway. The steel-framed, shatterproof backboard and all-weather net are mounted on a three-piece metal pole powder-coated for corrosion protection, with wheels on the base to make moving it easy. The height can quickly be adjusted to any height between 7 1/2 and 10 feet to accommodate younger or shorter players.

Rebound Robot
DR. DISH IC3 BASKETBALL SHOT TRAINER

\$599.99
Shooting baskets is fun, but chasing the ball isn't, which makes the Dr. Dish the best way to spend more time shooting. Designed to take mere minutes to install on most portable hoops, this innovative system automatically returns the ball to the player after each shot, leaving more time to focus on his or her shooting form and technique.



Pump It Up
MORPILOT AUTOMATIC ELECTRIC FAST BALL PUMP

\$24.99
There's just no way around it: You can't play basketball with an underinflated ball, but using an old-fashioned hand pump takes a lot of time and effort. The Morpilot makes topping off basketballs, footballs, rugby balls, and even inflatable pool toys easy and fast. Just insert the air needle and watch the gauge to see when the ball is fully inflated. Each USB charge inflates about 30 balls.

Are there books you'd recommend?
We'd love to hear from you. Let us know at features@epochtimes.com

RECOMMENDED READING *This week, we feature a vivid history of the world just before the Great War and an insightful commentary from a South Korean defector on America today.*

BIOGRAPHY
'La Duchesse'
By Bronwen McShea

It's 1620 in the Loire Valley in France. At 16, Marie de Vignerot marries a young nobleman only to be widowed by the time she's 18. She has aspirations of becoming a Carmelite nun. But her uncle, Cardinal Richelieu, who's both powerful and influential, has other aspirations for his favorite niece. Intelligent and accomplished, Marie will become a major player. Meticulously researched, this is a compelling story of a remarkable woman who rises to take center stage in France's Golden Age.

PEGASUS BOOKS, 2023, 480 PAGES

PHILOSOPHY
'Recovering Politics, Civilization, and the Soul'
By Daniel J. Mahoney

The recovery of politics, civilization, and the soul is no small feat. Mahoney has written 11 essays on how two modern conservative philosophers—the French philosopher Pierre Manent and the British philosopher Roger Scruton—worked to accomplish this feat. It's hard to say whether they succeeded but even more difficult to say they failed. Mahoney discusses what Scruton and Manent brought to the philosophical discussion that helped stem the ideological tide of soulless postmodern materialism.

ST. AUGUSTINE'S PRESS, 2022, 160 PAGES

HISTORY
'1913'
By Charles Emmerson

No one today has a direct, adult memory of 1913, yet it was a pivotal year. Much of today's world was in place. Telephones, radio, airplanes, and automobiles already existed. It was the last year of a century of relative peace, as 1914 opened a century of worldwide conflict. "1913" conducts a world tour of that time. Each chapter examines the geography, history, and culture of a featured city, along with its role in the greater world of the time. This is a fascinating and revealing book.

PUBLICAFFAIRS, 2013, 544 PAGES

FOR KIDS
'Me With You'
By Kristy Dempsey and Christopher Denise

Adorable illustrations and cheerful rhymes celebrate the special bond between a girl and her grandfather. From tea parties to playing on swings to sick days and grumpy days—this book fosters gratitude for the unique relationship between a child and grandparent. It tugs at the heartstrings and is perfect for trips to a grandparent's home.

PHILOMEL BOOKS REISSUE EDITION, 2013, 30 PAGES

SOCIAL COMMENTARY
'While Time Remains'
By Yeonmi Park

"In Order to Live" was Yeonmi Park's recounting of her childhood of privation and mind control in North Korea, her perilous escape, and her journey to the United States. In this follow-up memoir, she addresses the political indoctrination she has discovered in the United States, especially in college and among the elites. Park loves her adopted country, but fearing for its liberty, she warns about the censorship and ideologies that are now commonplace. It's a splendid call to guard our freedoms while time remains.

THRESHOLD EDITIONS, 2023, 224 PAGES

CLASSICS
'Twelve Great Books'
By Joseph Pearce

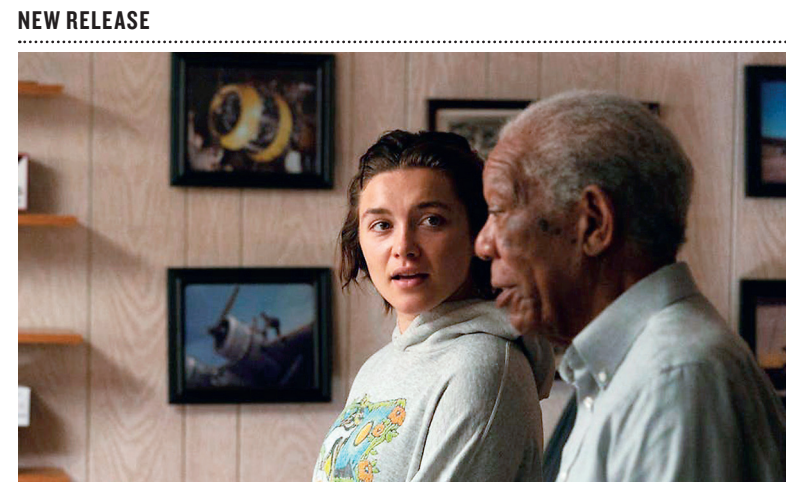
This collection of essays on classical literature includes reflections on St. Augustine's "Confessions," Shakespeare's plays, "Frankenstein," and six other novels by authors such as G.K. Chesterton, Oscar Wilde, and Evelyn Waugh. Pearce brings a wide knowledge of literature to these selections, evidenced in the many books he's written on J.R.R. Tolkien, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Catholic literary figures, and poets. The book is preceded by a survey of the great books of Western civilization.

IGNATIUS PRESS, 2022, 255 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 unique World War II French romance and an excellent drama about tragic loss and finding hope in unexpected ways.*



NEW RELEASE
'A Good Person' (2023)

Allison (Florence Pugh) is a woman in the throes of deep depression: She was behind the wheel when an accident resulted in the death of her fiancé's sister, Molly (Nichelle Hines). Molly's grieving father, Daniel (Morgan Freeman), is also having a hard time dealing with the loss. How can these two broken souls find healing? This is a deeply stirring film that examines not only how people deal with the loss of loved ones but also how they can pick up the pieces. Sometimes we can find reconciliation and forgiveness in the most unexpected of ways.

DRAMA
Release Date: March 24, 2023
Director: Zach Braff
Starring: Florence Pugh, Morgan Freeman, Celeste O'Connor
Running Time: 2 hours, 9 minutes
MPAA Rating: R
Where to Watch: Theaters
★★★★★



'The Man from Laramie' (1955)

James Stewart stars as mysterious wagoner Will Lockhart, a new face in a small town on the Western frontier. There's more to him than meets the eye, as he searches for those responsible for the death of his younger brother. This is a fantastic Western that combines the exceptional

acting of James Stewart, a great screenplay, and excellent direction by Anthony Mann.

WESTERN
Release Date: Aug. 31, 1955
Director: Anthony Mann
Starring: James Stewart, Arthur Kennedy, Donald Crisp
Running Time: 1 hour, 43 minutes
Not Rated
Where to Watch: Vudu, DirecTV, Apple TV
★★★★★

FAMILY PICK
'Enchanted' (2007)

When a nefarious queen casts Princess Giselle (Amy Adams) out of the magical realm of Andalasia, she winds up in Manhattan. As Giselle struggles to become acclimated to her new environs, she becomes torn between lawyer Robert Philip (Patrick Dempsey) and a handsome prince from her realm, Edward (James Marsden). Disney scores with this modern fairytale, a clever combination of live-action and animation, all in one entertaining package.

ANIMATION | ADVENTURE | COMEDY
Release Date: Nov. 21, 2007
Director: Kevin Lima
Starring: Amy Adams, Susan Sarandon, James Marsden
Running Time: 1 hour, 47 minutes
MPAA Rating: PG
Where to Watch: Apple TV, Redbox, Vudu
★★★★★

RESISTANCE AND ROMANCE IN WORLD WAR II
'The Last Metro' (1981)

During the German occupation of France, former star Marion (Catherine Deneuve) hides her Jewish husband, Lucas Steiner (Heinz Bennent), in the cellar. Things become complicated when Marion casts young actor Bernard Granger (Gérard Depardieu) as a leading man and feelings develop between the two. This outstanding film shows how the French maintained their ancient culture despite being occupied by invaders. It features incredible performances by its stellar cast, a rousing score, and heartfelt romance.

DRAMA | ROMANCE | WAR
Release Date: Feb. 19, 1981
Director: François Truffaut
Starring: Catherine Deneuve, Gérard Depardieu, Jean Poiret
Running Time: 2 hours, 11 minutes
MPAA Rating: PG
Where to Watch: Apple TV, Criterion Channel, HBO Max
★★★★★



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—Paul Behrends, consultant

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I’ve reviewed about **4,000 shows**, and **none can compare** to what I saw tonight.”

—Richard Connema, Broadway critic

“**A fascinating insight** into what China’s culture used to be and what I hope one day will be restored to China.”

—Edward McMillan-Scott, former Vice-President of the European Parliament

“**I encourage everyone to see** and all of us to learn from.”

—Donna Karan, creator of DKNY

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Announcing: New video platform from ShenYun—**ShenYunZuoPin.com**



Everyday Consideration

Common Courtesies for Time Spent With Strangers

It’s easy to get caught up in our own little world, but even still, we need to spend time out in public. Whether we’re shopping for groceries, walking the dog, or traveling, proper behavior is a must.

By Bill Lindsey

1 Manners on the Menu

While you may be sitting at your own table in a restaurant, there will be others around you also enjoying a great meal. A good rule of thumb is to act as if everyone hears and sees what goes on at your table. Be considerate of those around you; if your children become rambunctious, take them outside rather than reprimanding them at the table. Acknowledge and thank your server.



2 Enjoy a Fun Night Out

It’s exciting to watch sporting events or attend a concert, but the enforced closeness calls for enhanced etiquette. Avoid blocking the view of those behind you, and be gracious when someone needs to exit the aisle. Loudly singing along at a concert might seem fun, but those around you may not agree, so save it for the drive home. If someone is disturbing your enjoyment, let an usher address it rather than responding yourself.

3 Happy Shopping

While at the grocery or hardware store or exploring the local mall, be aware of other shoppers. Take care not to block the aisle or block access to an item someone needs to reach. When in line to check out, let someone with only one or a few items get in line in front of you. Treat the sales staff with basic respect; if they provide outstanding service, let their supervisor know.

5 Improve the Neighborhood

Manners matter while walking the dog, perusing a yard sale, or even mowing the lawn. Smile and nod at your neighbors; sometimes just being acknowledged can make someone’s day, and you never know who may turn out to be a great friend. When neighbors walk their dog past your house while you’re in the yard, greet them with a smile and a hello; you may discover they had been hoping to meet you.

4 Make Traveling Fun Again

When in a line to check in for a flight or at the hotel, be patient without loudly announcing your “priority ranking.” If you treat the cabin, gate, and hotel staff with respect, you may find yourself upgraded. If you eat or drink at the gate while waiting for your flight, clean up after yourself, and tuck any carry-on luggage under or next to your seat to avoid creating a tripping hazard.

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Vanessa Morrison, medical records clerk

“Well thought out material, thoroughly investigated, and I trust [the] sources.”

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Jan Hamilton, retired professional

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Creed Haymond, surgeon

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