

The CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR WEEKLY

*"The object of the Monitor is to injure no man,
but to bless all mankind."*

– MARY BAKER EDDY

WEEK OF JANUARY 20, 2025 | VOLUME 117 – ISSUE 9

CONTENTS

FROM THE EDITORS

Inauguration Day's range
of emotions1

GLOBAL CURRENTS

Israel has a Houthi missile problem. It's stuck finding
a solution.1

Massachusetts towns ban nicotine for a generation. Public
health win or overreach?2

In pursuit of a modern capital,
Ethiopian leader razes history4

THE EXPLAINER

Can DOGE cut \$2 trillion in federal spending? Not directly,
but it has Trump's ear.5

SCIENCE AND NATURE

After a Canadian orca pod's decline, now 'You can see the
whales coming back'.6

PEOPLE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Jim Curry helps transform deadly guns into tools for life . . .7

PROGRESS WATCH

Boston broke a record in 2024 for fewest homicides8

COVER STORY

With the inauguration of the nation's 47th president,
Americans prepare for the promises and perils of
Trump 2.08

PERSPECTIVES ON THE WORLD

Peace through compassionate justice10

The art of Poland's diplomacy.11

'A deeper sense':
How one reporter found the story at the heart of the story 11

GLOBAL NEWSSTAND.12

HOME FORUM

Lamenting life in the fast lane12

A CHRISTIAN SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE13

ARTS AND CULTURE

How does it go when a city offers to pay for your repairs? .13

With his absorbing film 'Hard Truths,' director
Mike Leigh sees people in full14

Wallace and Gromit return in 'Vengeance Most Fowl'.15

BOOKS FOR GLOBAL READERS

A Black journalist finds his liberation movement16

10 BEST BOOKS OF JANUARY16

IN PICTURES

Bringing glad tidings from the Bay of Fundy.17

SUDOKU18

CROSSWORD19

Inauguration Day's range of emotions

Inauguration Day, every four years, is like no other in the U.S. capital. Even in the winter chill, the crowds on the National Mall can number in the hundreds of thousands – or more. Anticipation is in the air. People from all over have come to witness the launch of a new presidential term, promptly at noon on Jan. 20.

I've seen my share of inaugurations over the years, sometimes from the viewing stands right below the Capitol Building, sometimes from the fringes of the Mall, sometimes on TV. It's always exciting, especially when a new party takes over and a hallmark of American democracy goes on full display: the peaceful transfer of power.



BY LINDA
FELDMANN
WASHINGTON
BUREAU CHIEF

Often, the most memorable aspect of an inauguration isn't the actual swearing-in or the parade down Pennsylvania Avenue or the celebratory balls. When Donald Trump took office the first time, in January 2017, he delivered an inaugural address that veered into dark territory, as he spoke of "American carnage" – a sharp departure from the usual unifying rhetoric.

The next day, press secretary Sean Spicer insisted that President Trump's crowd on the Mall was "the largest audience to ever witness the inauguration, period" – bigger than the million-plus people who had gathered for President Barack Obama's first inauguration eight years earlier.

Mr. Spicer's statement was demonstrably false, as photo comparisons showed. That episode also gave birth to Trump adviser Kellyanne Conway's infamous assertion of "alternative facts" that she said would prove the spokesman correct. Months later, after Mr. Spicer had resigned, he expressed regret over his handling of the matter.

Now, on the cusp of Trump 2.0, the nation is once again experiencing a range of emotions – from excitement to dread. Trump supporters will come to Washington for an inauguration-eve rally in the city's biggest sports arena, and then crowd the Mall the next day. Will anti-Trump forces show up to counter them? It's unclear. But security will be extra tight. In any case, many dispirited Trump opponents plan to be out of town that day. There's also no plan for a big women's march the day after Mr. Trump's second inauguration, as there was after the first.

Jan. 20 is also a federal holiday, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, honoring the slain civil rights leader. It's a coincidence that presents its own ironies. Mr. Trump made gains among Black voters last November, particularly men, but the vast majority still voted Democratic.

Still, the most remarkable aspect of Inauguration Day 2025 is that it features Mr. Trump, again. He's just the second American president in history, after Grover Cleveland in 1892, to score another term after losing his first reelection attempt. As I explore in my cover story, the Trump era is far from over. "Trump, unfinished" is an apt way of putting it. ■

TEL AVIV, ISRAEL

Israel has a Houthi missile problem. It's stuck finding a solution.

By Dina Kraft / Special correspondent

Pajama-clad and still half-asleep, millions of Israelis have been scurrying in the middle of the night – in some cases several nights in a row – to seek safety in stairwells and bomb shelters, roused from bed by the wail of air raid sirens.

Sounding the alarm each time has been the firing of a single ballistic missile from almost 1,400 miles away by Yemen's Houthi rebels, the last fully operational spoke in Iran's anti-Israel and anti-U.S. "Axis of Resistance."

Israelis had begun to feel life take a turn toward what passes for normal during wartime.

In Gaza, the fighting had been winding down, though casualties on both sides are mounting and the Israeli hostages are still being held captive.

In Lebanon, the rocket fire from a badly depleted Hezbollah has been halted by a Nov. 27, 2024, ceasefire. Iran's land bridge to Hezbollah has been severed by the fall of Syria's Assad regime.

Yet Israelis have found it only takes one Houthi missile in the dead of night to again wreak havoc and upend feelings of security.

This month, as Israel tries to halt the increasing missile fire, it is joining a list of regional and outside powers that have failed to deter the Houthis, including Saudi Arabia and the United States.

The resulting riddle of what to do is feeding an internal debate here: Continue to hit long-range targets in Yemen, or strike Iran, though it is considered to have only limited sway over the upstart Houthis, who revel in their ability to do harm both to Israel and to the world.

Over the past year, Houthi attacks on international shipping in the Red Sea, including to Israel, have threatened the key trade route connecting Asia to the Middle East and Mediterranean. Some 12% of global trade flows through those waters.

Houthis' solidarity with Hamas

The rebels say their attacks are in solidarity with Hamas in Gaza. Meanwhile a complete cessation to the war in Gaza – the Houthis' condition for holding their fire – remains elusive.

"The Houthis are feeling empowered because in the past year they have managed to hurt the Egyptian economy and the supply chain for Europe," says Eyal Pinko, a senior research fellow at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University and a former intelligence unit head in the Israeli navy.

"U.K. and U.S. attacks and even previous Israel attacks did not do much to make a dent," Dr. Pinko says. "They are driven not only by Iranian weapons and money but a very deep theological belief that Jews killed [the prophet] Muhammad." The Houthi motto, Dr. Pinko notes, proclaims, "Death to America, Death to Israel, Damn

WHY WE WROTE THIS

SAFETY

For more than a year, Yemen's Houthi rebels have launched long-distance missile and drone attacks on Israel and Red Sea shipping. After Israel largely subdued its Iran-allied enemies closer at hand, it is struggling to deter the Houthis on its own.

the Jews.”

Last month, after the Israeli air force attacked Yemen for the second time in a week, military analyst Amos Harel declared Dec. 27 that Israel “finds itself in a new war,” in which the “Houthis remain the primary threat to the center of the country, with zero effort from their point of view.”

Among the targets in Yemen hit by a force of 25 Israeli warplanes Dec. 26: the international airport in the capital of Sanaa, power stations, a port, and an oil terminal.

Unlike strikes against neighboring Gaza or Lebanon, such a mission, the fourth against Yemen since the war began, entails “an enormous effort” and intricate planning, Mr. Harel noted in the newspaper Haaretz. The jets require delicate midair refueling to reach their targets.

The Israeli defense establishment, meanwhile, “is trying to figure out how much the Houthis’ actions are independent and what level of encouragement they’re getting from Tehran,” he added.

The night after Israel’s strike, the Houthis responded with another missile, this time triggering sirens around Jerusalem.

According to Dr. Pinko, even assessing the Houthi arsenal, which appears to be regularly replenished by Iran, is a challenge, because until recently Israeli intelligence on the group was limited.

“The United States has made over 50 attacks on Houthi infrastructure and missile infrastructure and has not yet stopped missiles from being launched, so I don’t think the numbers are the issue,” says Professor Shaul Chorev, a retired rear admiral in the Israeli navy who heads the Institute for Maritime Policy and Strategy in Haifa.

And in a country as desperately poor as Yemen, where 80% of the country relies on international aid to get by after a 15-year civil war, it is also difficult to find economic leverage to deter the Houthis.

“There is no simple solution for the Houthis because of the nature of who they are. ... They operate according to a different calculus” from Israel’s other foes, says Jonathan Spyer, director of research at the Middle East Forum, a Philadelphia-based think tank.

It’s unclear just how much leverage Iran has over the Houthis, who like Hamas are more like a client with their own ideology than like an Iranian creation. Nevertheless, there are those in the Israeli establishment, including reportedly the head of the Mossad, who are pushing for an attack on economically frail Iran.

Iran as a possible target

Options could include striking energy and economic targets, though there is also talk of hitting Iran’s nuclear program. In a major retaliatory strike in late October, Israel targeted Iranian air defense and missile production sites.

The thinking is that “If Israel wants to address the problem, it has to go to the address of it, which is Tehran not Sanaa, and that in the run-up to [President-elect Donald] Trump’s inauguration and a different international environment, Israel has a desire to start this conversation,” said Mr. Spyer in late December.

“After six months of significant good strategic news for Israel, starting with a string of killings of both Hamas and Hezbollah top leadership ... there is a sense that they have Iran on the back foot. This comes with opportunities and threats,” he said.

The threat is that with their backs to the wall, Iran might work toward a nuclear weapon. But opportunity could lie in an economically stressed Iranian population angry over the billions invested in the Axis of Resistance instead of Iran’s own economy.

Professor Chorev, at the Institute for Maritime Policy and Strategy, injects a note of caution.

“I’m not sure that attacking Iran or attacking Houthi infrastructure is the center of gravity that will change the situation,” he says. He argues that like the international shipping crisis caused by the Houthis, the prospect of a nuclear Iran should be one countered by an international coalition, including regional and great powers, not by Israel alone.

In the meantime, “For the population, it is about morale. When once a night, central Israel has to wake up and take shelter ... this is what terror organizations like to do, to disrupt life; that is their aim. They don’t need to win in this age of asymmetric warfare.” ■

BROOKLINE AND CHELSEA, MASS.

Massachusetts towns ban nicotine for a generation. Public health win or overreach?

By Cameron Pugh / Staff writer

If you were born after 2003, you will never be old enough to buy cigarettes in Chelsea, Massachusetts. And as of Jan. 1, in at least eight other towns.

Municipalities in the Bay State are determined to create a “nicotine-free generation.” And three Massachusetts legislators announced they plan to file a statewide version of the bill in 2025.

The regulations have set up an ideological battle, as local officials and their constituents wrestle with how far governments should go to protect public health. Proponents see such rules as a way to save lives and eliminate a major societal ill. Detractors see a Prohibition-style overreach that undermines personal freedom and threatens small businesses.

WHY WE WROTE THIS RESPONSIBILITY

Who is responsible for the health of young people? Tobacco bans in Massachusetts towns have residents weighing public health concerns against individual freedoms and considering what it means to have a “nicotine-free generation.”

Similar attempts to sunset tobacco are picking up steam worldwide. The United Kingdom plans to ban cigarette sales for anyone born after 2008. Last year, members of South Australia’s parliament introduced a law that would do the same for those born after 2006.

It’s not yet clear if these regulations will spread elsewhere in the United States. But in Massachusetts, which has a long history of public health innovation, supporters seem optimistic.

“We’re at a level of readiness that is really the envy of most other states,” says Mark Gottlieb, a lawyer who runs Northeastern University’s Public Health Advocacy Institute. “This is a really good place to see where this policy can go.”

In 2020, Brookline, Massachusetts, became the only place in the world to enforce a nicotine-free generation bylaw. Anyone born on or after Jan. 1, 2000, will never be able to buy cigarettes there, according to the rule co-sponsored by Anthony Ishak, a pharmacist, and Katharine Silbaugh, a law professor. A group of convenience stores sued, arguing that the rule was unconstitutional and conflicted with state law.

This past March, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court dismissed that lawsuit, ruling that municipalities have the authority to regulate tobacco as they see fit. Since then, 11 other places have passed bans, including Concord, Reading, Needham, and Malden.

Adult smoking rates in the U.S. have declined precipitously in the past six decades, falling from 42% in 1965 to 12% in 2022. Youth rates have hovered in the single digits since 2017.

Yet tobacco remains the leading cause of preventable death in the U.S. Cigarette smoke kills some 480,000 Americans each year,

according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

What about personal choice?

Todd Taylor, a Chelsea city councilor, says he's glad he quit smoking 18 years ago. He encourages policies like community outreach and education to cut smoking rates. Yet he thinks nicotine-free generation bans infringe on choices that should belong to individuals – or, at the least, elected officials.

“These decisions should not be taken up by local boards of health,” he said at a Nov. 19 board of health hearing in Chelsea. “This belongs in the legislature.”

Local boards of health, which can be either elected or appointed, have largely led the charge in enacting generational tobacco bans.

“Whether you're in favor or opposed, it deserves a little bit more discussion,” says Peter Brennan, executive director of the New England Convenience Store and Energy Marketers Association. “People are tired of the government – in this case, a local, unelected board of health – telling them what they can and can't do.”

Yet proponents see banning nicotine as a boon for personal freedom. In interviews and at public hearings, they argue that addiction, not regulation, is a threat to freedom of choice.

In a 2022 survey, 53% of smokers had tried to quit in the past year. Only 9% did.

“Adult choice was taken away by addiction,” says Chris Bostic, policy director at anti-tobacco group Action on Smoking and Health. “And almost all [people who smoke] became addicted as children.”

The vast majority – about 87% – of people who smoke have their first cigarette before they turn 18 years old.

Concerns about stepping on individual freedoms in the name of the greater good is a perennial tension for public health officials. In some ways, today's debates about nicotine recall those that roiled the country during the COVID-19 pandemic, when cities imposed lockdowns and mask mandates. Then, as now, detractors sharply criticized government intervention that supporters said was necessary to save lives.

“Many Americans have died for individual freedom. Some things may not be good for you, and other things may be worse, but it's up to adults to have that freedom,” Stephen Helfer, co-founder of the group Cambridge Citizens for Smokers' Rights, says at Chelsea's hearing.

Massachusetts is also one of 24 states, along with Washington, D.C., that have legalized recreational marijuana. That approach stands in contrast with these cities' hard line on tobacco.

Mr. Bostic says that's comparing apples to oranges. “We can't equate them just because the main way of using them is to light them on fire,” he says. “We can at least address the product that by far kills the most people.”

Not all Massachusetts health experts agree that generational bans are the way forward. Vaughan Rees, director of Harvard University's Center for Global Tobacco Control, cites doubts that the rules will reach marginalized groups.

“I don't see any evidence or reason to assume that a generational-style law is going to support or promote advantages in some of the marginalized populations that we've been talking about,” Dr. Rees says. He points specifically to people who use illicit drugs, who also tend to smoke tobacco at higher rates. “Imposing yet another regulatory burden on marginalized communities may not yield the effects that we hope it might.”

Mike Siegel, a professor at Tufts University School of Medicine, agrees that such a law is unlikely to stop people who want to smoke. Yet he supports a ban, arguing that it may change social norms among young people.

“It's not just ‘Don't smoke because it's harmful.’ It's ‘We have declared you to be a smoke-free generation,’” Dr. Siegel says.

This isn't the first time that the Bay State has found itself at the cutting edge of tobacco control. The commonwealth was also the

first to restrict the sale of all flavored tobacco products, and to ban tobacco sales in health care establishments. At 10.4%, Massachusetts has one of the lowest smoking rates in the country.

Additionally, Massachusetts health boards are powerful compared with those in other states, according to Mr. Gottlieb. Their regulations carry the same legal weight as those enacted by local lawmaking bodies, giving them broad regulatory discretion.

In Brookline, Mr. Ishak sees phasing out tobacco as building on that legal history. “Historically, Massachusetts has been at the forefront of tobacco legislation,” he says. “It was firm territory to be able to try something like this.”

“I'm paying the price”

Under most nicotine-free generation laws, those who have already turned 21 can still buy tobacco products. Ms. Silbaugh believes this is a sensitive approach to regulating nicotine while acknowledging that some 23.6 million Americans have a dependency on it.

“Most adults who use nicotine or tobacco products don't want to be,” she says. A 2022 survey by the CDC found that 68% of people who smoke want to quit. “So the question is, How could we regulate it to be compassionate toward people who need it, but without adding to their ranks?”

In Ms. Silbaugh's eyes, it's also about retailers. Rather than take products off shelves immediately, phased bans shrink retailers' customer base over decades.

But in Brookline, at least one business is feeling the squeeze. Waseem Heriki says his father's convenience store is doing “one-third as well as it used to.”

“I'm hoping that the law gets changed,” Mr. Heriki adds. “I'm paying the price.”

Previous tobacco control initiatives also started small. In 2005, the board of health in Needham, Massachusetts, voted to make the town the first place in the country to raise its tobacco purchasing age to 21 – a policy that became federal law over a decade later.

Yet detractors say that health boards' reliance on expert opinions creates a blind spot to constituents' wants. “These boards of health are very biased in favor of the proposal, and they're biased in favor of their public health professionals that they interact with,” says Mr. Brennan, of the convenience stores association.

Will generational bans work?

It's too early to tell how successful these policies will be. Because they've never been tried before with tobacco, research is scant. Questions remain about if they could contribute to the creation of an illicit market, as happened when Massachusetts banned flavored tobacco products.

In Chelsea, where the smoking rate is 1.5 times the state average, young public hearing attendees seemed to revel in the idea that theirs could be the first generation for which tobacco is not an option. Of the four who spoke, all were in favor of the ban.

“This law challenges the prevailing notion that tobacco is a rite of passage,” Bhavika Kalia says. She's a high school student from nearby Somerville, which is also mulling a ban. “It is about taking bold action to protect the well-being of those who will lead our communities tomorrow.” ■

In pursuit of a modern capital, Ethiopian leader razes history

By Samuel Getachew / Contributor

One evening in late October last year, hundreds of concertgoers streamed into the Fendika Cultural Center, dressed to the nines for an evening out at one of the most iconic music venues in Ethiopia's capital.

For decades, traditional music clubs called *azmari bets* lined this road in the Kazanchis neighborhood, a glittering centerpiece of Addis Ababa nightlife. The smoke-filled pubs often hosted poet-musicians called *azmaris*, a kind of Ethiopian troubadour, and more recently, crackling Ethio-jazz groups as well.

Now Fendika was the last club standing. Beside it, bulldozers were waiting.

Across Addis, a massive urban transformation is underway. In

WHY WE WROTE THIS COMMUNITY

Ethiopian officials led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed want a modern capital. But as they demolish historic neighborhoods, residents ask, At what cost?

recent years, the government has flattened entire neighborhoods – including some of the city's most historic – to make way for new skyscrapers, mega shopping centers, wider roads, and parks. “Infrastructure and aesthetics attract wealth,”

explained Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed last year, comparing Addis Ababa's development to that of Dubai, United Arab Emirates. “They have magnetic power.”

But for the thousands of people across Addis whose houses and businesses have been destroyed, the campaign to build a 21st-century metropolis here often feels more like a vanity project than like an effort to make life better for its inhabitants.

“The endless beautification of the capital ... has made us strangers in our own land,” says Henok Abraham Tekeste, a taxi driver who was recently evicted from his home not far from Fendika.

In 2015 – light rail, airport, parks

For more than a decade, the roar of construction equipment has been a backdrop to life here. One of the first major projects was a Chinese-built light rail, which opened in 2015, followed by a new wing of the city's airport and several parks also financed and constructed by the Chinese.

When Mr. Abiy took over in 2018, he embraced the image of environmentalist, pledging that Ethiopia would plant 50 billion trees by 2026 and create parks – accessible only to paying customers – around the capital. In 2024, Ethiopia became the first country in the world to fully ban the import of combustion-engine cars to support the transition to electric vehicles, although only half the population has access to electricity.

Over the past year, he has accelerated the pace of Addis' “Dubai-ification.” This past March, Mr. Abiy announced that for the first time, foreigners would be allowed to buy land in Ethiopia, a move expected to attract investors primarily from the Gulf. Over the following month, the government razed nearly the entire neighborhood of Piassa – a historic Italian and Armenian enclave that was home to Ethiopia's first cinema (dubbed by some locals “the house of the devil”), the country's first modern pharmacy, and the earliest Italian coffee shops, which have become a mainstay in the city.

On a hillside perched above Fendika, a massive palace complex for the prime minister was rising from the earth. Mr. Abiy himself bragged that construction would cost as much as \$10 billion for a property that would include his official residence, a luxury hotel and guesthouses for foreign dignitaries, and three human-made lakes.

At the same time, a transit initiative called the Addis Ababa Corridor Project was bulldozing neighborhoods in order to reduce congestion by creating wider streets and dedicated bus lanes.

“A randomly built mud house does not constitute a historical heritage,” Mr. Abiy said to explain the demolitions.

Mr. Abiy's rapid-fire development projects, conducted without public consultation, call into question “whose vision is shaping the city's future,” argues Ethiopian architect Nahom Teklu in a message to the Monitor on the social platform X.

Fendika faced pressure for years to move off its increasingly valuable land. But the crisis came to a head last year, when the Addis government said it planned to demolish the complex to build a luxury hotel.

By that point, Fendika had been around in one form or another since the early 1990s, and had developed an international reputation for showcasing the diversity of traditional Ethiopian music. Its current owner, dancer Melaku Belay, got his start at Fendika in the late '90s, when he was a teenager living on the streets. The club's owner let him sleep under the bar, and he danced for tips during music performances.

In 2023, Mr. Belay and a group of Western diplomats who were fans of the center lobbied the government to stop demolition. They won a reprieve, but it proved brief.

This past September, the government began delivering eviction notices across the Italian neighborhood-turned-business-district where Fendika is located.

Addis Ababa's mayor, Adanech Abiebie, said the demolition of the old sections of Kazanchis would “enhance the beauty and cleanliness of the capital, making it a comfortable and attractive place for its residents.”

Short notice evictions

Azeb Tadesse, a grandmother who had lived in Kazanchis for three decades, was given three days to vacate the property she says she has owned for many years. The warning was delivered with a coded message scrawled in red paint across her door.

Ms. Tadesse says she was warned that if she protested the eviction, she risked being accused of being against development. So she reluctantly moved into her sister's housing unit in the suburbs. Now, she says, she feels like a “destitute refugee in my old age.”

Another former resident, Ayda Gugsa, now stays in a run-down two-bedroom rental unit on the outskirts of the city. She says she mourns the ease of life in Kazanchis.

“Where we are staying at the moment has no electricity, no functioning educational institutions for the children, and I am far from where I work,” she says.

Meanwhile, on Oct. 23, two days after Fendika's final concert, excavators' metal claws punched through the center's roof.

But a few days later, Mr. Belay emerged on Fendika's social media pages with an announcement. The government had given the center permission to rebuild – as long as it constructed a 20-story tower to match the other high-rises that would soon replace the neighborhood's flattened homes and businesses.

This is “certainly not our first choice,” wrote Mr. Belay on a GoFundMe page to support the reconstruction, “but it is the government's mandate if we are to keep Fendika's location.”

In the meantime, he explained that Fendika would give concerts at a nearby venue that had survived Kazanchis' demolition, the Addis Ababa Hyatt. ■

Can DOGE cut \$2 trillion in federal spending? Not directly, but it has Trump's ear.

Soon after winning the U.S. presidential election, Donald Trump announced the creation of the Department of Government Efficiency. Spearheaded by businessmen Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy, DOGE will have the job of spurring a downsizing of government by recommending where to cut waste, slash regulations, and trim the federal workforce.

Some Republicans say this is long overdue, while some Democrats and civil servants worry it would gut the institutional expertise crucial for effective government services.

The word “department” is a misnomer – DOGE will be an advisory body, lacking direct power. The plan is for it to work with the Office of Management and Budget, and to make recommendations to the president and possibly to Congress. But its two co-chairs appear to have ambitious plans: Mr. Ramaswamy said that if the department had a mascot, it would be a chain saw.

Q: How much has the government grown in recent decades?

The number of people employed by the federal government hasn't changed much since World War II, although federal contract- and grant-funded employment has grown. Congress has also created a swath of new agencies since then, and the Code of Federal Regulations has swelled from just under 10,000 pages in 1950 to 185,984 in 2019.

The national debt has nearly doubled since 2015, and now sits at \$35 trillion – or 122% of the United States' gross domestic product. Debt grew by about \$7.8 trillion in Mr. Trump's first term, and it

is projected to have grown by a slightly higher number by the time President Joe Biden finishes his term. Experts caution, however, that these numbers can reflect preexisting laws and circumstances outside a president's control.

Many federal workers have not returned to their offices since the pandemic, and as of

summer 2023, the government still was paying for 17 agency headquarters that were at 25% capacity or less, according to a Government Accountability Office report. Mr. Musk and Mr. Ramaswamy argue that unelected bureaucrats, and the government's size, make federal spending unaccountable to voters – a situation they called “antithetical to the Founders' vision” in a Wall Street Journal op-ed.

Q: What does DOGE hope to do?

Mr. Musk has suggested that \$2 trillion could be cut from the nearly \$7 trillion federal annual budget. He and his co-chair would have less than two years to complete their work: The department has a cutoff date of July 4, 2026, so as not to become another example of bloated government. DOGE's proposed cut is ambitious enough that even many of Mr. Musk's supporters question if that's within reach.

The plans to attack government spending are broad. DOGE's X account has highlighted spending on items it views as irresponsible, such as holograms of dead comedians and the construction of an IHOP in Washington. The co-chairs have also suggested ideas for slimming the number of federal workers, with Mr. Ramaswamy

saying that he expects certain agencies to be “deleted outright.” Other stated targets range from Medicare payments to Planned Parenthood funding.

Politicians have their own suggestions for cuts. Republican Sen. Joni Ernst sent the co-chairs a detailed “menu” ahead of Thanksgiving that included cuts to government leasing for vacant office buildings and money spent creating money (she found it costs the government three cents to make a single penny). Democratic California Rep. Ro Khanna and independent Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders expressed hope that DOGE could help to thin defense spending.

Q: What do Musk and Ramaswamy bring to this initiative?

Mr. Musk's businesses have a mixed track record of efficiency. His social media platform X has seen a 75% decrease in value since he laid off 6,000 workers, or roughly 80% of the staff, two years ago. His electric vehicle company Tesla's profits have been up and down recently. Mr. Musk has gone toe-to-toe with the Federal Aviation Administration over regulations on rocket launches at his company SpaceX, which has received nearly \$20 billion in federal government contracts since 2008.

Mr. Ramaswamy founded a pharmaceutical company that earned him a fortune. He advocates for libertarian values, and he pledged during the 2023 campaign to cut over 75% of the federal workforce.

“We are entrepreneurs, not politicians,” the two men wrote in their op-ed. But working with the federal government will present challenges. Given that DOGE's role is advisory, the co-leaders won't be able to make the kinds of direct changes they did as CEOs. If they want to work with Congress, they will have to win over members who may balk at spending cuts in their districts.

Still, supporters say these two executives shouldn't be underestimated. Mr. Musk appears to have the ear of Mr. Trump, which will be crucial in converting the advisory body's recommendations into practical change. The president-elect has invited Mr. Musk to attend high-level meetings, and he praised him during his 2024 victory speech.

Q: How feasible are Musk and Ramaswamy's plans?

Mr. Musk and Mr. Ramaswamy say they will present Mr. Trump with a list of regulations for the chopping block. Mr. Trump could then use executive action to order an agency to start the process to overturn that regulation. That can take over a year, involving a required analysis of the proposed change's impact and public comment. If the change is approved, people who benefited from the regulation are likely to sue. The two co-chairs will need to “do their homework” to avoid protracted legal battles, says Susan Dudley, founder of the George Washington University Regulatory Studies Center.

The co-chairs say that they are relying heavily on two recent Supreme Court decisions that limit agencies' ability to create and interpret regulations, which are based on statutes passed by Congress. The DOGE co-chairs hope courts will rule that regulations they target don't have a basis in law.

The two men could try to work with Congress, which can pass laws to overturn regulations, or to change or slow down the way regulations are created. But Republicans have a slim majority in Congress, so Mr. Musk and Mr. Ramaswamy might have to develop a strategy to garner bipartisan support.

That isn't an exhaustive list of options. For example, Mr. Musk and Mr. Ramaswamy could recommend that Mr. Trump implement a mandatory in-person, five-day workweek that could push federal employees, many of whom are still working from home, to resign. They could also move various agency headquarters out of the capital. Both are ideas that the co-chairs have proposed.

— Caitlin Babcock / Staff writer

SCIENCE AND NATURE

After a Canadian orca pod's decline, now 'You can see the whales coming back'

By Jules Struck / Contributor

Jim Borrowman cut the engine of the Nisku in the gray water of the Johnstone Strait, relinquishing his boat to an eastbound tide. He unraveled the line of a hydrophone – a cylindrical, underwater microphone – and dropped it portside.

On the other end of the cord a pint-size Honeytone speaker in the cabin broadcast a conversation from the deep: the ethereal, two-toned call of an orca whale to her clan.

"I think they're what we call 'AIs,'" said Mr. Borrowman, browsing a database of local orcas on his phone.

Mr. Borrowman has been watching, and watching over, these whales for decades. He was one in a band of Vancouver Islanders who successfully lobbied in the early 1980s to set aside a protected area for northern resident orcas, which lost a third of their population to hunting and capture in the 1950s and '60s.

This early act of ocean preservation laid a foundation from which decades of important research – and a deep local allegiance to the whales – have flourished. Galvanized by this data, environmentalists and First Nations

just won a battle to evict commercial open-net fish farms from the area, which compete with the orcas' food supply.

With early signs of abundant salmon, and a small but decadeslong uptick in northern resident population numbers, it

WHY WE WROTE THIS

A Canadian marine reserve created 40 years ago is credited with a rare win for the ecosystem: reversing the decline of one population of northern resident orca whales and deepening local human allegiance to the mammals.

feels to some like nature rallying.

"You can see the whales coming back," says Alexandra Morton, an author and marine biologist who has studied salmon in the Johnstone Strait since the 1980s. She was part of a protest group that occupied a Vancouver Island fish farm in 2017.

The AIs spotted by Mr. Borrowman from the bow of the Nisku are one pod of one type of orca, called northern resident killer whales, which number some 400 and live along the coast of British Columbia.

They're doing particularly well, and have been growing by a handful of members each year since the '70s. Northern residents are the most reliable visitors to the Robson Bight (Michael Bigg) Ecological Reserve, where Mr. Borrowman has served as a warden and run a whale-watching tour business with his wife, Mary, for decades. The Borrowmans also ran a museum in Telegraph Cove devoted to cetaceans and the reserve until a fire destroyed the building in late December. They are looking for ways to rebuild the museum's legacy.

"This is a beautiful, sensitive estuary at the terminus of a 100,000-acre watershed, the last untouched one on the east coast of Vancouver Island at the time," he says.

It's unique for another reason. At two known beaches at the mouth of the Tsitika River, northern resident orcas rub gracefully along the seafloor in what scientists have dubbed a unique "cultural behavior."

It was this behavior, first captured in underwater footage by Robin Morton, Alexandra Morton's late husband, that convinced the public, the press, and finally the government to set aside about 3,000 acres of water plus shore buffer as a protected area closed

to boat traffic.

Today, volunteer wardens with the Cetus Research & Conservation Society's Straitwatch program monitor the reserve and gather population data on the whales and their pods.

Despite the rugged nature of Vancouver Island, these waters do not exist in a bubble. In the 40 years since the reserve was created, the threats have become harder to see. Today, the whales' major issues are food scarcity, noise, and chemicals in the water.

But if the threats to orcas have become more complex, the responses have grown increasingly well informed by a bedrock of research, much of which has come out of the ecological reserve and its orbit.

"[The orcas] needed salmon farms gone. Other things got added to the list. They needed the boat noise reduced," said Ms. Morton. "But the reserve was our first step in that direction, and it was a very important one."

Decades of research have since shown that major pathogens and lice leak from the farms' suspended net pens straight into the paths of migrating salmon, ravaging their thin-skinned young and immobilizing the adults.

Pacific salmon are also an important food source and cultural pillar for First Nations. They are intricately linked to the ecosystem, and scientists have even tracked nutrients from decomposed salmon high into the mountains.

Ms. Morton campaigned for decades to close the fish farms. Nothing changed until she and Hereditary Chief Ernest Alexander Alfred, with a group of other First Nations people, peacefully occupied a Vancouver Island salmon farm owned by Marine Harvest.

That protest led to a 2018 agreement with the British Columbia government requiring the consent of three First Nations – 'Namgis, Kwikwasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis, and Mamalilikulla – for fish farms to operate around Vancouver Island.

First Nations closed more than a dozen salmon farms in and near the strait. Then, the federal government announced it would ban all open-net farms in British Columbia by 2029.

The decision is not universally supported by First Nations along the coast – 17 have agreements with salmon farming companies, which collectively employ around 270 Indigenous people, according to the Coalition of First Nations for Finfish Stewardship. Overall, open-net salmon farming accounts for 4,690 jobs and \$447 million in gross domestic product across Canada, according to the BC Salmon Farmers Association.

But for many, it was a turning point. Coho and especially Chinook salmon stocks spiked last year in Vancouver Island and its inlets, according to the Pacific Salmon Foundation, after years of downturn.

It's too early for data to directly link farm closures and the jump in salmon numbers, but many scientists agree that the farms can only be making it harder for wild fish.

It's a rare win for the ecosystem, says Ms. Morton.

"There's many people who have fought 30, 40 years like I have to protect something, and they don't see it rebound," she says. "And yet I'm getting that opportunity."

Boat noise is also a problem. Research suggests orcas are better at catching salmon in quieter waters, probably because they communicate while hunting. In waters noisy with boat engines, "Basically they're trying to yell over the noise," said Astrid Waite, Straitwatch north coordinator.

That research has encouraged both the British Columbia and Washington ferries that serve Vancouver Island to lower their noise levels.

The orcas face silent threats, too: persistent organic pollutants, which are remnants of chemicals used liberally by industry and in agriculture in the '80s and '90s. They remain in the water and have been found in high levels in orcas' bodies and breast milk, along with carcinogenic and mutagenic chemicals from oil spills and wildfire smoke.

That information – gained from years of meticulous research – is a powerful starting point, says Ms. Morton.

“It is very, very important for us to look at some creatures and figure out what they need and give it to them.” ■

PEOPLE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

WINCHESTER, MASS.

Jim Curry helps transform deadly guns into tools for life

Story by Troy Aidan Sambajon / Staff writer

Photos by Melanie Stetson Freeman / Staff photographer

Retired Episcopal Suffragan Bishop Jim Curry ignites his propane forge in the courtyard of Parish of the Epiphany church. Slowly he heats the barrel of a dismantled rifle to 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit, and then starts hammering the red-hot metal on his anvil. In minutes, a piece of once-deadly weaponry transforms into a humble weeding tool.

Bishop Curry then invites onlookers to try their own hand at making garden tools from firearm parts, using the forge that he takes with him to various communities in the Northeast region. With each strike of the hammer, participants mold a hopeful vision of a future without gun violence.

Before the demonstration, Bishop Curry gave a sermon explaining the mission of Swords to Plowshares (S2P) Northeast, a nonprofit that he co-founded a decade ago in New Haven, Connecticut. “At the forge, we hammer guns into gardening tools and art. We forge rings from shotgun barrels into hearts – symbolizing that the change we need begins in the transformation of our own hearts,” he told parishioners.

His work has inspired residents in Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Vermont to start their own independent S2P chapters, which host gun-surrender events in partnership with police departments. Law enforcement officials vet

WHY WE WROTE THIS

INNOVATION

The toll of gun violence on cities across the United States is stark. One retired bishop helps youths envision – and forge – a more peaceful future.

and dismantle the weapons, and then give the parts to the chapters for public blacksmithing demonstrations. Besides raising awareness about gun violence, the demonstrations help get young people interested in blacksmithing.

“One more gun is gone”

Montrel Morrison, who runs a youth mentoring organization in Connecticut, calls S2P Northeast a “safe haven and beacon of hope.”

“Young individuals impacted by gun violence need an outlet,” he says. “There’s something really transformative about breaking down a gun.”

Kam’eya Ingram, who spent the last two summers as a blacksmith with S2P Northeast, says that “When someone dies from gun violence, it’s like the world goes quiet.” But for her, hammering on the anvil fills the silence with a resounding release of emotions.

“You’re getting everything out at once,” she says, adding, “I feel like I’m bringing people peace – letting them know that one more gun is gone and that this [gun violence] might not happen to someone else.”

Bishop Curry has been a steadfast voice against gun violence,

a calling shaped by his deep commitment to serving communities.

Born and raised in Oak Park, Illinois, he studied religion at Amherst College. He graduated in 1970 and started his career working in public schools in Huntington, Massachusetts, as a middle and elementary schoolteacher for 10 years. Yet he longed to serve the spiritual needs of his community.

That desire led him to the seminary in 1982, and, three years later, he was ordained as a deacon and priest in the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut. He focused his ministry as a spiritual adviser, working in hospitals with families in Connecticut and addressing the devastating impacts of gun violence and suicide. By 2000, he was elected suffragan bishop of Connecticut.

His life “changed entirely,” he says, in the wake of the December 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, which killed 20 children and six adults. That day, he went to console the grieving community because Newtown was in his diocese.

After he became the officiant for the funeral of one of the children, Bishop Curry felt motivated to be a guiding light through darkness. “We always have the opportunity to claim hope,” Bishop Curry says. “That keeps me going.”

In early 2013, he joined other Episcopal bishops in Washington, D.C., and helped found Bishops United Against Gun Violence. Through that group, he learned about the Guns to Gardens movement, a network of nonprofits that repurposes unwanted firearms into garden tools and artwork.

Bishop Curry studied the basics of blacksmithing to start his own chapter in New Haven. “You have to try new ideas because the old ones don’t work,” he explains.

In 2014, he co-founded his chapter, S2P Northeast, with Pina Violano, a trauma nurse and nursing professor at Quinnipiac University. The group’s namesake peacebuilding mission comes from the Old Testament (Isaiah 2:4): “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”

S2P Northeast has partnered with a Colorado organization called RAWtools on a nationwide gun-surrender program and, before the COVID-19 pandemic, taught blacksmithing skills to incarcerated people.

New Haven Police Chief Karl Jacobson says that S2P Northeast is an important ally against gun violence.

“I’ve seen far too many people lost to senseless violence in my career, so I’m glad to see guns which could fall into the wrong hands turned into something which helps our citizens,” he said in a statement.

“The real life of the forge”

For Bishop Curry, “the real life of the forge” has been to empower teens from New Haven through summer job opportunities. They are paid to transform guns through blacksmithing and help lead public demonstrations.

S2P Northeast recently received a hefty multiyear grant from the Connecticut Department of Public Health to expand its summer internship program to boost awareness of gun violence prevention.

Jared Sanchez, age 18, takes pride in being a junior blacksmith instead of working a teenager’s typical mundane hustle. In a single day, he can make seven or eight garden tools out of shotgun barrels. He has also created a heart necklace for his younger sister and a cross to sit beside his grandfather’s urn.

Growing up in Yonkers, New York, Mr. Sanchez saw “a lot of guns and a lot of gun violence,” he says. When he moved in 2021 to New Haven, he became jaded by the sights and sounds of gun violence and felt “numb to it all,” he adds.

After two summers serving as a blacksmith alongside Bishop Curry, Mr. Sanchez has come out of his shell and come into his own as a leader. Handling so many firearm parts has revealed to him the

depth of the gun violence problem in his community and the work that must be done to combat it.

“The gun that you got rid of and we destroyed could’ve been the gun that kills,” he says. “People die every day from gun violence. We’re actually doing something about it.” ■

PROGRESS WATCH

Boston broke a record in 2024 for fewest homicides

By **Troy Aidan Sambajon** / Staff writer
and **Jacob Turcotte** / Graphics editor

Boston has set a new record. The city rang in the new year with its fewest homicides and shootings in a single year – for the second year in a row.

In 2023, it reported 37 homicides, its lowest number ever since the Boston Regional Intelligence Center began counting. The murder rate of 5.29 per 100,000 residents was the city’s lowest in the 21st century.

In 2024, Boston reported 24 homicides – a little over half of the 40 it had just two years ago, according to the City of Boston Homicide Dashboard.

The historic decline began early. In the first quarter, the city of 654,000 residents saw the largest drop among all big U.S. metropolises: Homicides plunged 82% compared with the same period the year before, ahead of second-best Philadelphia (37%).

There were only three homicides by June. Even during the summer months, which often see more crime, there were just 17 reported by the end of September – a 60% reduction year to year.

Gun violence remains the leading cause – in Boston, as well as nationwide – with fatal shootings accounting for 20 of last year’s 24 homicides. However, shootings also reached record lows in the city, signaling a broader decline in violent crime.

In 2023, Mayor Michelle Wu announced a violence prevention plan to cut homicides and shootings by 20% by 2026. The city has already surpassed that target.

While it’s difficult to pinpoint a specific cause for the steep decline, public safety experts point to the tight-knit network of neighborhood associations and community-based organizations focusing on young people at risk for violence. For his part, Police Commissioner Michael Cox, in early 2024, credited an increase in anonymous tips and the growing trust and cooperation of Boston’s residents.

“There seems to be a renewed effort to include the community in the process of public safety,” says Jack McDevitt, a professor emeritus of criminology and criminal justice at Northeastern University. He also points to Massachusetts’ low gun ownership rate and stricter gun laws.

“Boston has always been a place where the community was involved,” he adds. “But under Commissioner Cox, it looks like he has made a renewed effort to get more community voices, more different neighborhoods, trying to say, ‘What are your problems? How can we deal with them?’ And certainly on top of that list would be homicide.”

While Boston remains an outlier, overall violent crime and homicides continued to drop in 2024 in the United States, after a spike during the pandemic. When compared with cities with similar population sizes, Beantown has fared pretty well: In 2023, Washington reported 274 homicides, Baltimore had 259, and San Francisco 53.

Professor McDevitt cautions that one or even two years does not a trend make. However, he points out, in 1990 the city recorded 152

homicides – a record high. “Now we’re talking about the 20s. It’s a pretty amazing turnaround.”

■ *Hear Troy talk about his early reporting on Boston’s low homicide rate. Visit www.CSMonitor.com/BostonHomicide.*

COVER STORY

With the inauguration of the nation’s 47th president, Americans prepare for the promises and perils of Trump 2.0

WASHINGTON

Micki Witthoef wipes a tear from her eye and apologizes. “I’m sorry; it’s an emotional time,” says Ms. Witthoef, standing outside the Central Detention Facility in Washington, D.C.

She’s the mother of Ashli Babbitt, the rioter who was shot dead by law enforcement during the Jan. 6, 2021, storming of the U.S. Capitol by supporters of President Donald Trump.

It’s a chilly Christmas Eve, and about 20 people are standing outside the Washington jail, taking part in the nightly vigil supporting those still being held here for their actions on that day. What does Ms. Witthoef expect from President-elect Trump when he takes office again Jan. 20?

“I believe he will keep his word, and he will start the process to either commute sentences or pardon people,” Ms. Witthoef says. She began the vigils Aug. 1, 2022, after “Ashli talked to me in my dream.”

That the nightly protests have lasted nearly 900 days is a testament to the participants’ passionate support for those sometimes known as J6ers. And they’re but one example of how Mr. Trump – even out of office – has been a uniquely dominant force in American public life since the day in June 2015 he rode down the golden escalator in Trump Tower to announce his run for president.

By then, Mr. Trump was already famous as a New York real estate developer and reality TV personality. But when his story is fully told, it will be for ushering in a new era that has upended American life, both politically and culturally.

Ironically, by losing his first bid for reelection in 2020 – making way for a four-year “interregnum” with President Joe Biden, and then pulling off the first nonconsecutive presidential reelection since Grover Cleveland in 1892 – Mr. Trump has extended his public dominance by four years.

At the launch of his second term, political analysts say, the stakes are even higher than when he took office eight years ago.

“The times are more fraught globally and more fraught economically,” says Matthew Dallek, a political historian at George Washington University. “The divisions and level of rancor and vitriol and political violence have intensified since he was first in office.”

Last summer’s two assassination attempts on Mr. Trump are high-profile examples. So, too, is the killing of United Healthcare CEO Brian Thompson on a Manhattan street in December. Several top Trump appointees have faced bomb threats, according to the president-elect’s transition team. Overall, threats against public officials have risen over the past decade.

More broadly, Mr. Trump has stayed in the public spotlight virtually nonstop since losing reelection in 2020, claiming repeatedly and

falsely that the election was stolen, and then staging an improbable comeback in November. A clear example of Mr. Trump's dominance came a year ago – well before clinching the 2024 nomination – when he lobbied successfully to kill a bipartisan Senate deal on immigration, effectively holding on to the issue for his campaign.

The various criminal and civil cases against him also kept him in the headlines, and may well have helped him win last November as he cried legal persecution. With Mr. Trump now poised to become the 47th president, most of those cases have evaporated.

It is within this atmosphere of ferment that long-simmering talk on the left of a potential “Trump dictatorship” persists. Mr. Trump himself seems to revel in the speculation, telling Fox News late in 2023 that he wouldn't be a dictator if elected again – “except on Day 1.”

Indeed, the opening act of the Trump sequel promises to be momentous. The president-elect has said the message of his second inaugural will be “unity” – a sharp departure, if true, from the dystopian picture of “American carnage” he painted in his first.

Next will come dozens of executive actions – at once typical for a new president, and in Mr. Trump's case, expected to reflect the transformative intent of the second term. Beyond the anticipated pardons of J6ers, other measures include the closing of the U.S.-Mexico border, the start of mass deportations of unauthorized migrants, the removal of job protections for thousands of federal employees, and expanded oil drilling. (See sidebar on page 26.)

When asked how the second term will differ from the first, a Trump insider – speaking not for attribution so as to speak freely – puts it this way: “He knows what he's doing. This time around, it's not just pie in the sky.”

IN FACT, THE SHOCK AND AWE of Trump 2.0 began soon after Election Day. A string of highly controversial Cabinet picks consumed public discourse. Matt Gaetz, a now-former Florida congressman and Trump loyalist, withdrew from consideration for attorney general amid serious ethics concerns, including reports (later detailed in a House Ethics Committee report) of paying for sex with a minor and of drug use.

Mr. Trump's aggressive posture toward the mainstream media is perhaps just a foretaste of his pledge to seek “retribution” and prosecute so-called enemies, including President Biden, special counsel Jack Smith, and former Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney.

WHY WE WROTE THIS

With his reelection, Donald Trump cements his place as one of the most significant leaders of the 21st century. When his story is fully told, it will be for ushering in a new era that upended American life, both politically and culturally.

In December, he settled a defamation lawsuit against ABC News and George Stephanopoulos for \$15 million, after the host inaccurately stated that Mr. Trump had been “found liable for

rape” in a civil case. Another lawsuit, against the Des Moines Register and others over a preelection poll that showed him losing in Iowa, will at a minimum cost the defendants in legal fees, if not have a chilling effect on less wealthy outlets going forward.

During an eight-week period before the election, Mr. Trump attacked the media publicly more than 100 times, according to the group Reporters Without Borders.

Another eyebrow-raising episode came in late December, when Mr. Trump revived the first-term idea of having the United States buy Greenland, a territory of Denmark – and of reclaiming control over the Panama Canal, which the U.S. began to cede to Panama in 1977. Such headline-grabbers may be just talk, designed to create leverage toward other

goals. Indeed, Mr. Trump's suggestion that Canada become the 51st state is widely seen as a joke, albeit one aimed at trolling the U.S.'s northern neighbor as the president-elect threatens tariffs. But at the very least, all the expansive suggestions present Mr. Trump as an empire-builder, astride the world stage.

More central to Trump 2.0 has been the rise of world's-richest-man Elon Musk as both a sidekick and a governing force. Before the holidays, it was Mr. Musk who led the charge in Congress, via his own social platform X, killing the first attempt at a compromise bill to keep the government funded – hours before Mr. Trump weighed in. A later bill passed, averting a shutdown.

Mr. Musk so dominated the shutdown narrative that critics dubbed the duo “President-elect Musk” and “Vice President-elect Trump.” The actual president, Mr. Biden, has receded publicly as he approaches retirement.

Mr. Musk's stated role in the second Trump term is to co-lead, along with entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy, a new advisory commission called the Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE. The intent is to recommend massive cuts in the federal bureaucracy and regulations.

But Mr. Musk has also been more than just an adviser to Mr. Trump. He's effectively become part of the Trump family, taking part in phone calls with world leaders, reportedly weighing in on Cabinet choices, and often appearing with Mr. Trump at his Florida estate and at public events.

Can the bromance last? It's impossible to say. A schism within the MAGA movement has emerged over the South African-native Mr. Musk's support for granting visas to skilled foreign workers. Die-hard Trump supporters oppose all types of immigration. Late in December, Mr. Trump suggested support for H-1B visas for immigrant workers, but the issue remains an open question.

For now, the Musk factor looms large. The DOGE king's megaphone is arguably as big as Mr. Trump's, given the multibillionaire's social media, and he has a much vaster bank account. Mr. Musk has also made clear he'll deploy his cash in the 2026 midterms to take on Republican members of Congress who defy the president.

THE RISE AND RETURN OF MR. TRUMP haven't happened in a vacuum. The world over, populists and strongmen have come to power amid continuing postpandemic economic disruption, increasing inequality, and growing anti-immigrant sentiment.

David M. Kennedy, a Pulitzer Prize-winning historian at Stanford University, remembers the words of President George W. Bush in an Oval Office meeting with scholars back in 2006.

“There are three things happening in this country that really bother me, and I'd like to hear your perspective: isolationism, protectionism, and nativism,” Professor Kennedy recalls President Bush saying.

“Well, here we are, 18, 19 years later, and you could name the same three items today,” Dr. Kennedy says.

But the Stanford scholar suggests that the idea of the U.S. sliding toward authoritarian rule is a stretch.

“The great preoccupation of the founders was the containment of power – the power of the legislature, the power of the executive, the power of the courts,” Dr. Kennedy says. “They built a system to guarantee that too much power would never end up in one place.”

Historian Tevi Troy, a senior aide in the second Bush White House, says he doesn't see Mr. Trump as a “dictator,” instead pointing to a trend toward greater presidential power that began well before the Trump era.

“Congress has just ceded power over the past 20 years, and presidents have accumulated power as Congress cedes it,” says Mr. Troy, a senior fellow at the Ronald Reagan Institute.

Still, Mr. Trump's ability to enact his agenda will have its limits. Elements that need to go through the newly seated House of

Representatives will face the smallest margin of control in modern history, with just a four-seat Republican majority after the resignation of Mr. Gaetz. And the Senate is far from the 60 votes needed to overcome a filibuster, with a 53-47 Republican majority. The new GOP Senate leadership has promised to keep the filibuster in place.

Actions by Mr. Trump that wind up in federal court could well face a Biden-appointed judge; the president gained confirmation of a record 235 federal judges during his term. The Supreme Court's 6-3 conservative majority can be expected to help Mr. Trump, but offers no guarantees.

Julia Azari, a political scientist at Marquette University in Wisconsin, also sees limits to the idea of absolute Trump rule, given the closely divided Congress. And despite Mr. Trump's claims of a mandate, his victory last fall was not a sweep. He fell just short of a majority of the popular vote.

"The political minority is setting the agenda, and that sets us up for very deeply contentious politics," Professor Azari says. That is true not just in partisan terms, but also demographically, she says, noting Mr. Trump's inroads into both the Hispanic and Black communities.

Ultimately, she says, "Trump has created a political environment in which, even when he hasn't commanded a national majority, people have to respond to him."

LINDA JEW IS "OVERJOYED" by the 2024 election result.

"I said prayers every night for Donald Trump that he would be our president again," says the Republican from Parker, Colorado.

Ms. Jew can trace her family back to a Chinese merchant who arrived in the 1800s. Now, in the city's latest immigration chapter, Denver has tracked the arrival of nearly 43,000 migrants since late 2022. At home in Parker, some 20 miles south, Ms. Jew says illegal immigration is a chief concern. She doesn't like how federal funds have been spent on migrants, including for temporary shelters.

"Biden is just giving away all our money" to unauthorized immigrants, she says. "And not helping the American citizens."

Newsmax, Tucker Carlson, and Steve Bannon help her make sense of a changing world; she's watched her state in recent decades trend from red to purple to blue. She says Mr. Trump's campaign stop in Aurora, where he pledged to crack down on "migrant crime," made her feel less alone.

The retired dental hygienist recalls one patient, years ago, scolding her for being conservative. He told her she was supposed to be a Democrat – as a woman and minority.

"You just reduced me to a stereotype," she recalls replying. The man's assumption cemented her beliefs all the more.

Still, it's hard to talk with loved ones who disagree. Like the time a family member called Mr. Trump "Hitler" over the phone. Ms. Jew hung up. But that didn't feel right. So she called back.

Farther west, in San Francisco, Kimberley Rodler is also still processing the election that was. During the campaign, the architect-turned-art-teacher traded in years of frequent flyer miles to travel to battleground states, from Nevada to Michigan to Pennsylvania, and canvass for the Democratic ticket. This reporter met her last fall in Florida, where abortion rights were on the ballot.

In all, Ms. Rodler says later on the phone, she knocked on 2,460 doors, and has no regrets – not that she loved every interaction. She recalls canvassing in Nevada the day of the Trump assassination attempt in Pennsylvania.

"I was confronted at two doors by Trump supporters with guns," Ms. Rodler says. "I was wearing a Biden-Harris T-shirt or button, and this woman comes up and says, 'Five minutes, if you're not off my property, you're shot!'"

Now Ms. Rodler is immersing herself in poetry and art, clinging to happier memories from the campaign, like the first-time voters she met who were grateful to be heard.

"I saw so much of the beauty of the people," she says. "We are neighbors; we are civil people."

Polls, in fact, show that Americans share much common ground, at least on issues if not on candidates. A preelection survey in six battleground states and nationally by the University of Maryland found bipartisan consensus on a range of issues – from the cost of living to reproductive rights to the border.

Still, the nation's closely divided politics promise to make enacting the Trump agenda more difficult than he has suggested at times, from reducing inflation and cutting taxes to fixing the broken immigration system. As Inauguration Day approached, Mr. Trump sought to tamp down expectations.

For decadeslong Trump observers, this is a moment to take stock. Looking back to his days as a publicity-minded Manhattan businessman and reality TV performer, few could imagine the historic figure he'd become.

When Gwenda Blair was writing her 2000 book chronicling three generations of the Trump family, she says she grasped that Donald Trump had "a really acute understanding of American culture, politics, economics, the whole schmeer, and was acutely laser-focused on what a large number of people really felt and really wanted to hear."

"He is a consummate salesman," says Ms. Blair. And in Mr. Trump's final campaign, she says, she saw an understanding of the American psyche that has reached "a whole other cellular level."

Back at the Washington Central Detention Facility on Christmas Eve, the mood outside on the sidewalk dubbed "Freedom Corner" is hopeful, even festive. Mr. Trump is about to retake office, and one of those imprisoned expresses optimism in a call to a participant's cellphone, amplified for the assembled supporters to hear.

The U.S. Capitol, the scene four years ago of one of the most shocking episodes in American history, is just 2 miles down the road. But on this night, it feels a million miles away.

■ Staff writer Sarah Matusek contributed to this report from Denver.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE WORLD

THE MONITOR'S VIEW

Peace through compassionate justice

At the outset of the new year, assessments of global security warn that conflict is spreading across more countries worldwide and a new scramble for nuclear weapons is underway. Yet a more encouraging trend is worth noting: In unlikely places, higher ideals of justice and equality are poking through.

On Dec. 31, Zimbabwe joined the growing list of nations – now 149 – that have abolished the death penalty in law or practice. The reform marks a significant step in strengthening the rule of law. Since 1980, the southern African country has been governed by a single party with a long record of corruption and human rights abuses.

Courts will review each case, revising sentences one by one based on a range of factors, including compassion and forgiveness. It is "more than a legal reform," said Justice Minister Ziyambi Ziyambi. "It is a statement of our commitment to justice and humanity." Similar measures have been adopted in recent years in Ghana, Pakistan, and Malaysia – to name a few.

Two societies emerging from decades of dictatorship may reshape themselves with tenets of what is often called transitional justice. After the fall of the Assad government in Syria in December, the country's liberating forces immediately opened the regime's prisons and began preserving documents showing the scope of its abuses.

The interim government in Bangladesh, meanwhile, established a commission to investigate disappearances and extrajudicial killings just two weeks after the country's autocratic leader, Sheikh Hasina, was deposed in a student-led uprising. In the panel's first report, in December, it documented more than 1,600 cases and began mapping the ousted regime's secret detention centers.

"We are working anew to return our dear Bangladesh to the road of equality, human decency, and justice," said Muhammad Yunus, head of the transitional government, in an interview with the website Big News Network on Dec. 29.

While no hard evidence exists that adopting more compassionate forms of justice diminishes the prospect of a country engaging in warfare, there may yet be a correlation. As the Death Penalty Information Center notes, capital punishment and extrajudicial killings disproportionately affect ethnic, religious, and racial minorities. Such inequality fuels radicalization and encourages violence. But the opposite is also true.

The first step South Africa took after ending apartheid in 1994 was to abolish the death penalty. That decision set the country's new democratic era on a foundation of equality and reconciliation. "Retribution cannot be accorded the same weight ... as the right to life and dignity," declared then-Justice Arthur Chaskalson, who was also president of the Constitutional Court.

Zimbabwe, Syria, and Bangladesh may now be building on that example. When societies base justice on a recognition of the inherent value of every individual, their neighbors reap peaceful dividends. ■

THE MONITOR'S VIEW

The art of Poland's diplomacy

In recent years, Europe has struggled to find the right balance between freedom of expression and the protean security concerns it faces. Plenty of rights watchdogs see a drift toward more censorship. Now Poland is about to challenge that view.

On Jan. 1, the country assumed the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union. Prime Minister Donald Tusk has laid out an agenda under the motto "Security, Europe!" It involves boosting economic competitiveness, defending Ukraine, and finding new solutions to immigration and disinformation.

Yet Poland is set to show that its concept of security has a deeper dimension rooted in creativity and individual liberty. From January through June, it will convene roughly 100 cultural events in more than 20 European countries. They include concerts, art exhibitions, movie festivals, literary events, and plays. Organizers say the intention is to showcase younger artists and encourage "creative exchange across borders."

"This demonstrates the significant role our country plays on the international cultural scene by providing a safe space for creative expression for those who face persecution or whose countries are presently at war," stated Olga Brzezińska, deputy director of the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, which is curating the events, on the organization's website.

Poland's emphasis on art and European security reflects its own internal shift. Since taking office just over a year ago, Mr. Tusk has rolled back restrictions on artistic freedom imposed by his nationalist predecessors. His reforms underscore art's ability to elevate democracy through contested ideas.

"Art feeds on differences and their mutual observation of each other," Andrzej Bednarczyk, rector of the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, told the Polish newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* this past November. "It is a way to look at the world through other people's

eyes and enrich your own vision with this difference."

Empathy and humility are forms of security, too. ■

BEHIND THE SCENES

'A deeper sense': How one reporter found the story at the heart of the story

A new writer's reporting put him face-to-face with a mother who lost her son to gun violence. For this episode, he worked with a producer to offer an audio annotation of his interview with her, hoping to show the mother's strength and agency.

By **Jacob Posner** / Staff writer

and **Mackenzie Farkus** / Associate multimedia producer

In 2022, Linda Smith lost her son, Dre'shaun Johnson, to gun violence.

She's still making sense of what happened to her and her family. Through a lengthy interview, Ms. Smith gave me the privilege of a window into her thinking. That helped inform my story on Purpose Over Pain, a Chicago-based organization that supports people who have had experiences like hers.

I met Ms. Smith in Boston. She had just participated in The Gun Violence Memorial Project, which Purpose Over Pain helped create. The traveling memorial features personal objects contributed by the loved ones of people lost to shootings. But I couldn't fit much of her story into my report. So I suggested a special episode of our "Why We Wrote This" podcast that I hope offers a deeper sense of how she moves through the world.

I was so moved by Ms. Smith's generosity and warmth, her agency and love. My aim was to illustrate not just her experience of grief, but also a little more of who she is, and how she has stayed resilient. ■

■ Staff writer *Jacob Posner* recently joined the Monitor's "Why We Wrote This" podcast to offer an annotated version of his interview with a mother who lost her son.

Find the full episode at www.CSMonitor.com/WhyWeWroteThis.

THE GLEANER / KINGSTON, JAMAICA

America's 'fourth border' must unify to negotiate with Trump

"[U.S. President-elect Donald] Trump's remarks about [taking back the Panama Canal] ... reinforces The Gleaner's previous advice to the Caribbean Community ... that it formulates a common and coordinated policy for engaging the US under his presidency," states an editorial. "... Engagement with the United States doesn't mean adopting a hostile posture. ... Rather it is about identifying matters of mutual interest to both sides, establishing the Caribbean's priorities and demarking the community's red lines. ... There is no advantage in [Mr. Trump's] kind of muscle-flexing for the Caribbean, often described as America's fourth border."

EUOBSERVER / BRUSSELS

The EU no longer serves all equally

"The European Union likes to present itself as a bastion of democracy, equality, and human rights," writes Salvador Santino Regilme, a professor and chair of the international relations program at Leiden University. "But beneath the surface lies a troubling reality: the growing grip of Europe's super-rich on its policies and institutions. ... The [EU's] emphasis on market liberalisation and fiscal austerity has eroded social safety nets and weakened welfare systems across member states. ... Tax loopholes, opaque regulatory frameworks, and privatised public goods are symptoms of a system rigged in favour of the few at the expense of the many. ... The stakes are clear: will the EU remain a union of justice and democracy, or will it become a playground for the super-rich?"

THE NEWS INTERNATIONAL / KARACHI, PAKISTAN

Be wary of unvetted online information

"Increasingly, people are turning to the digital world to access news and opinions on political, social, and cultural happenings," writes columnist Kamila Hyat. "... One of the most pressing concerns is the reliability of the information it disseminates. ... Digital platforms often lack rigorous editorial oversight, making it difficult to discern fact from fiction. ... The shift to digital media represents a pivotal moment in the history of information dissemination. ... The onus is on all of us – media organisations, governments, and individuals – to ensure that the digital world becomes a force for good rather than a source of division or misinformation."

THE JORDAN TIMES / AMMAN, JORDAN

Israelis are suffering the costs of war

"What are some of the hidden impacts of war and conflict on people and societies?" writes Jawad Anani, an economist and politician. "... [Zaki Kamal, a Palestinian Israeli academic and lawyer, wrote about] how Israel's most recent war efforts have come at the lofty cost of lower growth rates, a weakened economy and bigger budget deficits. ... The heavy cost of war always impacts the poor and working class of Israeli society. ... This war campaign has also led

to the mass relocation of people living in kibbutzim and subsidised colonial outposts. These massive inconveniences are adding to the daily burdens of people, pushing them to protest in the streets."

TORONTO STAR / TORONTO

Is patriotism giving way to global solidarity?

"Canadians are no longer very proud to be Canadians," writes columnist Gillian Steward. "... What happened? ... Is it because inflation has got us down? ... Or too much immigration and not enough housing? ... Or maybe it's all Justin Trudeau's fault. [The Canadian prime minister announced his resignation Jan. 6.] ... That's what we are hearing from the naysayers about our lack of patriotism. They would point to all those factors, add some more and then call for more flag raising. ... Maybe what's changing us is the rise of global connections to the detriment of national ones. We see it in our approach to climate change: it's all countries working together not individual nations. We see it in our trade [and money] system. ... The global empire is being forged before our eyes and is held together by a common culture and common interests. ... These are all signs of the ways in which the world is increasingly intertwined."

– Compiled by Nate Iglehart / Staff writer

HOME FORUM

Lamenting life in the fast lane

After my wife and I learned that we would be giving our two boys twin siblings – words I still can't type without my palms getting sweaty – we quickly became a two-car family: Alongside our trusty old 2009 Honda Accord, we now have a brand spanking new Honda Odyssey. It's a veritable fleet; I'm basically Jay Leno.

And yes, we are living large.

Because when you have little kids and just one measly car, your options are limited. If Mom and Dad are both going somewhere, then we're all piling in. Sorry, kids. Or if Mom and kid No. 1 are at a birthday party, then Dad and kid No. 2 are marooned at home. A one-car life is one of finitude and limitations.

Well, goodbye to all that. In our new, glamorous two-car life, the world is our oyster: I can run to the grocery store while my wife takes the kids to the doctor; or my wife can shuttle the kids to the library while I pop on over to Home Depot to look at tiling, rub my chin thoughtfully a few times, and come no closer to making a final decision; or I can drive one boy to a birthday party at an indoor play space while she takes the other to a different birthday party at a different indoor play space.

It is thrilling.

But there's a dark side to life in the fast lane. Having two cars is like having an iPhone on wheels: Because you can do more things, you naturally gravitate toward doing them. As a result, you pack the schedule. Rest and unstructured downtime, already scarce commodities in a young family, become scarcer.

Although the two-car life doesn't necessarily cause the overscheduling and extra-extracurricularization of our lives (What comes first: the activities or the cars?), it definitely helps enable it.

Here in northern Virginia, where a typical grade schooler's weekday starts with a 5 a.m. earnings call with Singapore, followed by school, debate club, travel soccer, homework, travel

violin, a working dinner, weight training, and a Teams wrap-up with Seattle, we don't really need more activities. (Yes, our kids deserve enriching activities. But there's a line, and it doesn't take truth serum to admit that we probably cross it more often than we'd like.)

Oh, deceitful two-car life! You promise a life of more options and, as the obligations stack up, deliver one with fewer of them.

Look, I don't want to complain or sound ungrateful – I drive a Honda

Odyssey LX in obsidian blue pearl. It's got a *moonroof*.

And with twins, it's not as if I would or could go back, anyway. Having two cars was a natural and necessary evolution for my family, as it is for many families. But the temptation to give in to hyperactivity is ever present.

What's the antidote? Unless you up and move to a remote cabin in Maine, I'm afraid there is none.

But since becoming a two-car dad, I've discovered that limits can be liberating. When you know you can't do everything, you have no obligation to try. You simply say no, and just like that, time and space open up in your day. But when you think you might be able to do everything, you press down on the gas hard ... and end up frazzled or frustrated when the inevitable failure and burnout ensue.

Maybe you've caught me in a mawkish mood, pining for simpler times and searching for a scapegoat, but sometimes I miss those days when we were all crammed into the old Accord, little legs kicking the backs of our seats, everyone going everywhere together, simply because we had no other choice.

So, despite my recent admission to the two-car club, I'll be doing my best to keep a one-car mentality.

– Zach Przystup

A CHRISTIAN SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE

Stopping hateful behavior

Years ago, I dealt with an acrimonious work relationship. Someone was behaving in a way that felt truly hateful toward me, and I couldn't understand why. I slept fitfully at night and frequently awakened hours early just to study the Bible and to pray for the courage to face another day at work.

I thought that knowing more of the story behind the malicious behavior might give me insight to stop it. But my attempts to talk to the person to understand the problem only augmented the aggression.

Then one morning I realized that I could expect God to do more than just help me endure the hate. We have a ready remedy in God, divine Love. Christ Jesus' healing ministry demonstrated that God, divine good, is the only real influence on us. All of us, as God's children, are in truth the spiritual reflection of God's goodness. Recognizing this spiritual reality enables us to overcome evils in any form, including hate.

Monitor founder Mary Baker Eddy wrote, "At all times and under all circumstances, overcome evil with good. Know thyself, and God will supply the wisdom and the occasion for a victory over evil. Clad in the panoply of Love, human hatred cannot reach you. The cement of a higher humanity will unite all interests in the one divinity" ("Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures," p. 571).

Pondering that passage helped me feel "unstuck." Divine Love has created us spiritually in its own image – not as vulnerable to evil or possessing difficult personalities, but as always expressing God's powerful goodness and love. We are already equipped by Love to meet any challenge. I held on to that sweet

promise as I prayed to know myself and others as God knows us, rather than focusing so much on the problem.

One way to think about "panoply" is armor. Divine Love cares for each of us so completely that we have built-in armor that protects us from evil. There is no God in hate and no hate in God, the divine all-power – nor can there be hate in God's reflection. Hate can't invade or even touch us, so complete is our armor of inviolable divine good. All of God's children are shielded by God's love from anything that might provoke hate, because hate isn't an actual power – God is infinite. Clothed with this awareness, we come to recognize hate as a seeming affront to the presence and power of Love – it has no power to create a clash.

Inspired by these ideas, I went to work feeling equipped to deal with any hostile behavior with love instead of fear. And when an act of hostility occurred that day, it came to me to firmly state aloud that there was nothing but love between us. Only love. It was said with such certainty that it surprised us both! But the spell of hate broke, resulting in a definitive healing. From that point on, our interactions were genuinely agreeable.

Willingness to yield to divine Love is a form of spiritual warfare against the false belief that evil is a controlling power. We all have God-bestowed authority to defeat hate, to experience and express the highest degree of goodness in our human affairs. Divine Love is the infinite power that provides the wisdom and strength to do this. We are never cornered, never powerless. As the Bible tells us, God "will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid" (Leviticus 26:6).

– Michelle Boccanfuso Nanouche

ARTS AND CULTURE

BERLIN

How does it go when a city offers to pay for your repairs?

By Lenora Chu / Special correspondent

A sad army of broken electronics sits in my shoulder bag. It's a rainy fall weekday in Berlin, and I live in a city that has decided to pay people to repair stuff to reduce waste.

I mentally survey what I lug carefully across the wet cobblestones of Metzger Strasse. The flat iron whose plates press frizz out of my hair – and no longer lie flat; the motor on my black household fan, which shuts off after a few minutes; the iPhone whose battery depletes itself in an instant.

Berlin's *reparaturbonus* won't be a windfall – the most it pays is about \$200 per device – but I may divert a few things from the electronics graveyard.

The most valuable thing in the bag is my husband's palm-size Marantz audio recorder. It's both expensive and practically useless: It reads data cards only when they are held in place by an insistent finger – unfortunate for a busy broadcast journalist.

"I don't want anyone messing with it. It's important for my work," my husband had said that morning, eyeing my lumpy sack of electronics, to which I'd hoped to add his out-of-production jewel. "It still works sometimes."

I coaxed it away from him, and saw that he'd jury-rigged a rubber-band contraption to hold the data card door closed.

"Trust me," I said, with a smirk. "Trust Berlin."

The Berlin city government budgeted \$1.3 million in 2024 to try out its version of a program that has worked in other German cities

as well as in Austria. To anyone who fills out qualifying paperwork, it will pay back half of repair costs between \$80 and \$420 to fix any item on an eclectic, six-page list that includes powered toothbrushes, breadmakers, table saws, and smartwatches.

The goal is to incentivize people to avoid waste and use things longer. “*Reparaturbonus* should be copied everywhere,” says Stefan Neitzel, owner of Berlin bike services shop Fahrradstation, “because it gives a small incentive for consumers, and for repair places, and it also might incentivize the manufacturing industry to build items that are repairable.”

The program sounds great in theory, but given my experience with Berlin – a city full of good intentions – I’m guessing it’ll be difficult to get things fixed in a decentralized repair economy and then compel a creaking German bureaucracy to reimburse me.

Repairs – potentially a boom business

Matthias Urban confirms one of my suspicions.

I’d noticed his repair shop on walks in my neighborhood. I shake off my umbrella, and step over the threshold into a brightly lit shop

with warm brown laminate flooring lined with refrigerators and vacuum cleaners. Mr. Urban glances at my stuff.

“The fan – I’ll have a look at that,” he says, dismissing the other things.

Calls to Mr. Urban’s shop have increased 50% since Berlin announced the program in September. “People sometimes

WHY WE WROTE THIS — INNOVATION —

Berlin has been paying half the cost if you repair electronics rather than throw them away. That sounds better than it worked out in practice for our reporter.

bring in parts they’ve sourced themselves,” he says, making me feel like a bad customer. “They’re now considering repairs rather than buying new things,” he says, nodding with satisfaction.

“The fan – leave it here. I’ll call you in a week.”

One device down, three to go. Mr. Neitzel of Fahrradstation is acting as a bit of a repair consultant, and he tells me that success will boil down to whether the part can be sourced.

“The repair industry is underdeveloped,” he says. “There’s huge demand for repair services, but success starts with good workers and ends with the whole supply chain.”

“People bring in the craziest things”

I have high hopes for my next stop, Thauer Technology, a store with a bright-blue awning.

Daniel Thauer is an information technology specialist born to a certified television master craftsman, and father-and-son expertise is housed under one roof. A bear of a man with brown-rimmed glasses, Mr. Thauer is surrounded by cardboard boxes and electronic devices, in various stages of function. I weave my way past a washer-dryer combo to the front desk. Mr. Thauer peers down at my broken stuff.

He motions at the Marantz, which I pass through a slot in the pandemic-era plexiglass shield. He fiddles with the data door. “People bring in the craziest things,” he tells me, “such as a power strip, which is nonsense because a new one costs only €5 to €10. Strange. Not worth repairing. Neither is a hot water kettle with a broken casing.”

Well-known brands are going to be the best bet, because replacement parts are easy to procure. For everything else, it’s a 50-50 chance, says Mr. Thauer. “Maybe we can get a new casing for this. Maybe we can’t,” he says after dialing Marantz and getting no answer. “I’ll call you in a week.”

Still waiting

Back at home I put the flat iron in a cardboard box and stash it under the bathroom sink. I make a mental note to buy a new iPhone.

A week later, Mr. Urban calls: “Come pick up the fan.” I’d bought it in Asia, where I lived before moving to Europe, and he can’t get a replacement part for the motor.

It has now been two weeks, and my husband has stopped asking about his audio recorder; Mr. Thauer still hasn’t heard from Marantz. “I think I’ll hear next week,” he says.

Berlin authorities have said they expected to make a decision at the end of 2024 whether to renew the program. It has been wildly successful in the economically challenged state of Thuringia in central Germany: Its first round in 2021 pulled in more than 6,000 applications and doled out \$422,000. There, the program is in its fourth year.

I haven’t picked up my black fan from Mr. Urban; I like the idea of it hanging in the storage room with other abandoned appliances.

Reparaturbonus hasn’t worked for me – yet. But there’s satisfaction in having tried. ■

ON FILM

With his absorbing film ‘Hard Truths,’ director Mike Leigh sees people in full

Filmmaker and cast treat a complicated character with compassion.

Mike Leigh sees people in full. He knows that how we present ourselves to others does not always express who we really are. He literally takes nothing at face value. This gift, this humanism, is particularly pertinent to his fine new film, “Hard Truths,” because its central character is someone who often behaves unconscionably. Leigh is certainly not endorsing such behavior. He is attempting something much more difficult: He wants to *understand* it.

When we first see Pansy (Marianne Jean-Baptiste), a London housewife, she wakes up screaming. It takes her a moment – in the half-darkness, alone in bed – to register her whereabouts.

But no sense of relief comes over her.

Leigh was right to introduce Pansy to us in this way. It sets up her divided soul. Pansy is always on a tear about something. She chastises her woebegone husband, Curtley (David Webber), for not being neater. “I’m not your servant,” she growls. Her 22-year-old son, Moses (Tuwaine Barrett), mopes in his room playing video games. “What’s your ambition?” she yells at him. Her tone is not that of a concerned mother. It’s a howl of disgust.

It soon becomes clear that Pansy only comes alive when she is at odds with the world. At the supermarket, she holds up the checkout line and foments a shouting match. In a parking lot, sitting morosely in her car, she trades insults with a driver looking to take her spot. At the dentist’s office, she refuses hygienic protocols and proclaims, “I am a clean person.”

Pansy’s outbursts come so thick and fast that, for a while, we take an almost morbid pleasure in waiting for the next one. She blows up the aggravations we have all experienced and turns them into cataclysmic events. It would all be grimly funny except that we know, because of how we were introduced to her, that she is in pain. Pansy’s vehement sorrow, and her inability to fathom it, allows us to see her as more than a pathetic exemplar



ON FILM

BY PETER
RAINER

of comic exaggeration.

Despite her protestations, she has a yearning for family. This longing makes her awareness of what she is missing all the more poignant. In the rare moments when she is not on the attack, she shuts down and goes nearly mute. Her husband and son barely speak with her – they are afraid to set her off. But her sister, Chantelle (beautifully played by Michele Austin), who runs a beauty salon, indulges Pansy’s moods because it is clear that, despite everything, they are close. A scene in which the two of them visit their mother’s grave resonates with sisterly regrets. Pansy contradicts Chantelle’s recollections of being close to their mum. “Your memory is not mine,” she says.

After the cemetery excursion, Chantelle brings her reluctant sister, and Curtley and Moses, to a Mother’s Day meal at her flat, where she lives with her two bubbly daughters (Ani Nelson and Sophia Brown). Pansy can’t accept their good graces. She thinks everybody hates her, but doesn’t make a scene. Her silence in itself is a cause for concern. Taking Pansy aside in another room, Chantelle asks her, “Why can’t you enjoy life?” Pansy says she doesn’t know why, and it’s the truest thing she says in the movie. Chantelle’s next words to her are like a consecration: “I love you. I don’t understand you, but I love you.”

It would be too convenient, I think, to write this movie off as a study of untreated mental illness. The performance of Jean-Baptiste (who was so memorable in Leigh’s “Secrets & Lies”) transcends the clinical. She shows us what lies beneath Pansy’s suffering. This woman who can’t abide other people is terrified of being alone. Jean-Baptiste and Leigh have the utmost compassion for what Pansy is going through. Extreme as she is, we can see ourselves in her. A lesser movie would have tidied things up at the end, but Leigh is too much of an artist for that. He recognizes that in matters of the heart, and of the mind, easy resolutions are few.

■ “Hard Truths” is rated R for language.

ON FILM

Wallace and Gromit return in ‘Vengeance Most Fowl’

The new caper encapsulates everything that makes “Wallace & Gromit” movies a joy.

Wallace and Gromit are accustomed to danger. The mad-cap inventor and his loyal dog have faced foes such as a deranged robot, a serial killer who targets bread bakers, and an archnemesis who is that most fearsome of creatures, a penguin.

But in late 2023, the claymation duo appeared to face an even worse peril. Their clay manufacturer was going out of business.

Without it, Aardman Animations wouldn’t be able to continue creating its beloved animated characters.

Aardman, which has also made features such as “Chicken Run” and “Shaun the Sheep Movie,” hastily issued a statement. It reassured fans that it had ample storage of clay. Thank goodness. The company was in the middle of filming “Wallace & Gromit: Vengeance Most Fowl.” The film, which opened in limited theatrical release Dec. 18, 2024, and



ON FILM
BY STEPHEN
HUMPHRIES

debuted on Netflix Jan. 3, 2025, will delight fans.

If you’ve never seen any of the previous “Wallace & Gromit” films – and you really should; they’ve won three Oscars – here’s what you need to know beforehand. The eccentric inventor and his canine companion live in the northern British county of Lancashire. Their greatest love in life is cheese – especially rolls of Wensleydale. But their suburban life is far from mundane. Wallace is perpetually hatching daft schemes. In the duo’s first adventure, “A Grand Day Out” (1989), he built a rocket to go to the moon. Why? It’s made of cheese.

A long-running joke is that Gromit, who doesn’t speak or bark, is smarter than his owner. Well, he is a beagle. And unlike that *other* famous animated beagle, who only dreams of donning goggles and flying a Sopwith Camel, Gromit can actually pilot a plane and drive a car. He also makes cups of tea. If Gromit were to compete in the Crufts dog show, it would be akin to Tiger Woods entering a mini-golf tournament.

“Vengeance Most Fowl” picks up where an earlier adventure left off. In “The Wrong Trousers” (1993), Wallace and Gromit foiled a penguin who masterminded a jewelry heist. The new movie begins with the thief, Feathers McGraw, being sentenced to life imprisonment inside a maximum security facility. Namely, a zoo. Meanwhile, Wallace and Gromit are blissfully unaware that the penguin is hatching a plot to escape, enact revenge, and once again steal a priceless diamond.

Their day starts, as always, with an alarm clock that activates a Rube Goldberg-like machine. It lifts Wallace out of bed, plops him onto a conveyor belt that gets him in and out of a bathtub, puts clothes on him, and whisks him downstairs to the breakfast table. Cue Gromit’s signature eye roll. Later that morning, Wallace unveils his latest invention, a robot garden gnome. Norbot can accomplish any task. That makes him an ideal tool for Feathers McGraw to commandeer for his villainous scheme.

“Vengeance Most Fowl” encapsulates everything that makes “Wallace & Gromit” movies such a joy for children and adults. Its humor is unabashedly silly, yet slyly clever. The new movie reprises one of the best sight gags in “The Wrong Trousers.” Feathers McGraw is a master of disguise. To pass as a chicken, the penguin pulls a rubber dishwashing glove onto his head. It’s as effective as Clark Kent’s glasses.

This time out, creator Nick Park is joined by a co-director, Merlin Crossingham. They frame their shots with unusual camera angles. Aardman continues to test the boundaries of what it can accomplish with painstakingly handcrafted claymation. In this latest adventure, the animators venture underwater. Also impressive: the characters’ facial emotions. There’s comic mileage in Gromit’s expressive eyes – ranging from exasperated to determined – as the heroic dog endeavors to save the day. A staple of “Wallace & Gromit” movies is an elaborately staged chase scene. Park and Crossingham raise the bar yet again with a “Mission: Impossible”-style climactic sequence in which Gromit pulls off stunts worthy of Tom Cruise.

Given the creativity on display, it feels churlish to complain about disappointing aspects of “Vengeance Most Fowl.” But it must be said that some storyline elements feel too much like a retread of “The Wrong Trousers.” As that adventure was, this one may have worked better as a short film than as a full-length feature. And perhaps it’s time to take the characters to a fresh location, one that’s as unexpected as their voyage to the moon.

Will there be more “Wallace & Gromit” movies? Although Aardman’s clay supplier has gone out of business, the animation company said in its press statement that it has engineered a solution “to ensure a smooth transition to new stocks.”

To paraphrase Wallace, “Job well done, lads.”

■ “Vengeance Most Fowl” is rated PG.

A Black journalist finds his liberation movement

“I Am Nobody’s Slave” begins as a memoir – and evolves into a compelling American story.

By Ken Makin / Contributor

Lee Hawkins’ devastating memoir, “I Am Nobody’s Slave: How Uncovering My Family’s History Set Me Free,” is about the ties that bind, both familial and societal. Hawkins, an editor and reporter for The Wall Street Journal, details the harsh realities of growing up in a middle-class Black family with deep, unacknowledged ancestral wounds. These moral, psychological, and physical injuries drove his parents to inflict frequent beatings on their three children in the twisted hope that keeping them in line, and out of trouble, would protect them from a racist society.

The book begins innocuously with personal anecdotes about the importance of the Black church and male mentorship in Hawkins’ life. The narrative shifts after Hawkins’ family moves, when he is a kindergartner, from a largely Black area of St. Paul, Minnesota, to the white suburb of Maplewood for better schools. It is an idea akin to that of the Great Migration, where Black folks moved to Northern states in hopes of escaping Jim Crow. The author’s predecessors left Alabama in search of better opportunities for employment and education. However, there was no hiding place for Hawkins – not from racism, nor from his hypervigilant parents. Their concerns about racial conflict and violence, as well as fears for their son’s safety, were justified, even if their behavior was not. The visceral racism directed at Hawkins included everything from vile epithets to targeted hate mail.

Hawkins acknowledges that white people were not the only perpetrators of violence, which he describes in his recollection of the iconic “Roots” TV miniseries:

“Rewatching the scene years later, I saw the white overseer of the enslaved people hand the whip to a Black man and command him to do the whipping. In his relentless pursuit to strip the proud Black boy of his confident sense of freedom in his Black identity, the white man never even had to touch Kunta Kinte. The enslaved Black man obeyed his order and did the white man’s dirty work for him.”

Hawkins notes the pushback on Black mobility and expression, both from within his family and outside it. There were efforts to discourage Hawkins’ outspokenness, which ultimately led to a budding interest in politics and a successful career as a writer.

What begins as a memoir evolves into a compelling American story fueled not only by research into race and sociology, but also by Hawkins’ genealogy. His family history shows how violence and rape in the era of chattel slavery can be felt over the generations, both for the family of the enslavers and for the enslaved.

At first, I was hesitant to appreciate Hawkins’ need to outline his childhood experiences in such painstaking detail. His intent becomes clear, however, as the story continues. The writer wanted readers to feel the same heartbreak he experienced. Ultimately, through self-reflection and the help of a therapist, he was finally able to construct his own figurative manumission papers.

Hawkins’ memoir, while wholly honest and emotional, is not entirely sad. There are threads of Black entertainment and interpretations of empowerment that work in this book like they do for so many Black folks here and abroad – as symbols of hope.

Hawkins speaks about his late father’s affiliation with Sounds of Blackness, a musical ensemble from Minnesota whose most recog-

nizable song is “Optimistic.” It is a providential footnote, much like the mentions of “Roots.” There is also an underlying appreciation for Black political consciousness and fluidity, a welcome contrast to the mass media depiction of a monolithic voting bloc. Much like Hawkins and his father, I also remember watching “Tony Brown’s Journal” with my dad, and though Brown joined the Republican Party in 1990, he opened his show to guests of all political and social walks of life.

I smiled when Hawkins mentioned Stacey Patton as a point of reference in stopping violence against children. Dr. Patton’s “Spare the Kids: Why Whipping Children Won’t Save Black America” is an essential work advocating against corporal punishment, and her 2008 memoir, “That Mean Old Yesterday,” reads similarly to Hawkins’ work. I would be remiss if I didn’t note the similarities in their families and upbringing – seemingly perfect from the outside, while violent behind the scenes. Nevertheless, both of them are doing the reclamation work necessary for not only themselves, but also generations of people disenfranchised by racism and caught in patterns of violence.

Hawkins’ willingness to discuss his “mean old yesterday” offers a new hope in the present. If we can acknowledge the trauma of slavery and the fact of its continuing repercussions – individually, within families, and in this country – we can begin the task of healing.

It is a liberation movement worth reading about and practicing. ■

10 BEST BOOKS OF JANUARY

What Monitor reviewers like best this month.

1 Good Dirt

by Charmaine Wilkerson

Charmaine Wilkerson tells the story of Ebby Freeman, her grief-encumbered family, and a treasured clay jar crafted by their enslaved ancestor. Yanked into the spotlight as a child by tragedy, Ebby finds herself again in its glare after a wedding day humiliation. Wilkerson’s winning novel shifts between Ebby’s mental health escape to France and the family’s resilient, 19th-century predecessors. Fortitude and forgiveness abound.

2 Elita

by Kirsten Sundberg Lunstrum

In 1950s Seattle, the cocooned life of a scholar and her young daughter slips its moorings following dual storms: the case of a girl plucked from the wilderness, and the return of the scholar’s husband after four years of silence. The author delivers a provocative examination of self-worth.

3 All the Water in the World

by Eiren Caffall

When furious winds and flooding hit post-apocalyptic New York City, Nonie and her family must flee their cobbled-together home atop the natural history museum. Using a canoe from the collection, they escape up the Hudson River. Storms, snags, hunger, and humans – some good, some suspect – stud the path in this fast-paced tale.

4 The Lotus Shoes

by Jane Yang

In 18th-century China, an embroidery artist is sold into slavery to the distinguished Fong family. Jane Yang’s debut novel focuses on the plight of Chinese women hemmed in by traditions such as bound feet and polygamy. These ancient practices collide with Western values as the women seek independence.

5 Aflame

by Pico Iyer

Travel writer and spiritual thinker Pico Iyer has spent time at a Benedictine hermitage in California, a seemingly idyllic setting. “Aflame” takes a closer look at his longtime retreat. By reminding us that no place is perfect, Iyer points readers to the restful silence they might find in their own hurried lives.

6 Black in Blues

by Imani Perry

Imani Perry’s cultural history, subtitled “How a Color Tells the Story of My People,” uses the color blue as a lens into Black life. From indigo dye to Nina Simone’s “Little Girl Blue,” she examines the hue of celebration, mourning, and oppression.

7 Islamesque

by Diana Darke

Though many of Europe’s most iconic buildings were made in the architectural style known as Romanesque, their design and construction – executed at the highest level of craft – were derived almost entirely from the Muslim world. In this pioneering work of scholarship, Diana Darke strives to give credit to the Muslim artisans who produced these architectural marvels.

8 I Am Nobody’s Slave

by Lee Hawkins

Lee Hawkins’ devastating memoir details the harsh realities of growing up in a middle-class Black family with deep, unacknowledged ancestral wounds linked to the family’s enslaved past. Hawkins manages to escape his troubled home life, and comes to realizations about slavery’s ongoing legacy.

9 Somewhere Toward Freedom

by Bennett Parten

Bennett Parten offers an original take on U.S. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman’s March to the Sea, the campaign that weakened the Confederacy in the Civil War. Describing the campaign from the perspective of the thousands of enslaved people who abandoned plantations to follow Sherman’s troops, the historian recasts it as “the largest emancipation event in US history.”

10 The Containment

by Michelle Adams

Legal scholar Michelle Adams traces school desegregation efforts in her native Detroit and their reverberations throughout the North. She focuses her compelling narrative on the 1974 Supreme Court case *Milliken v. Bradley*, which ruled that majority-white suburban school districts could not be forced to desegregate.

IN PICTURES

Bringing glad tidings from the Bay of Fundy

Story by Sara Miller Llana / Staff writer

LOWER TRURO, NOVA SCOTIA

It happens twice a day, every day, and has for thousands of years. But watching the world’s highest tides arrive and recede in the Bay of Fundy never gets old.

At the head, the tide can rise about as tall as a four-story building. Photographer Melanie Stetson Freeman and I drove to Burntcoat Head Park in Nova Scotia, where visitors can walk onto the ocean floor when the tide is out and return hours later to see it disappear under the 160 billion metric tons of water that flow into and out of the bay each day.

At the Fundy Discovery Site, tourists can witness a tidal bore, or a wave that moves upstream in a river. The times for the day’s bores are listed outside the visitor center, but on this mid-September day, birds began flocking around the banks of the Salmon River, announcing the bore’s arrival. “It’s like the cavalry coming up over the hill,” says Nancy Wood, visiting with her husband, Leonard, from North Carolina.

Within 15 minutes, the bore rolled in, covering the riverbed upon which the birds had been happily perched at low tide. “You don’t see this every day,” says Mr. Wood. ■

Sudoku difficulty: ★☆☆☆

4		1		8	3		6	
			2			4		
6	7	3			9		8	2
9	8				2		5	
7	4		6					8
3		5				7		
			8	2		6	7	5
8	5						4	
			9		5	8	1	

How to do Sudoku

Fill in the grid so the numbers 1 through 9 appear just once in each column, row, and three-by-three block.



Crossword and Sudoku solutions

© Lexipuzzles

V	A	N	S	V	A	N	S	V	A	N	S
C	A	B	A	S	I	S	O	N	E	C	O
C	O	D	S	L	I	S	T	S	M	O	R
L	A	C	E	D	V	I	N	E	L	A	C
A	G	O	E	D	E	N	T	A	C	K	O
T	E	E	N	A	N	Y	C	O	N	E	D
E	D	Y	R	U	S	E	M	O	N	E	D
S	A	P	P	A	N	T	E	D	E	P	T
H	U	E	M	A	R	I	N	A	T	E	D
O	R	E	P	L	A	N	D	A	T	A	M
O	A	K	H	E	M	S	S	P	A	M	O

4	2	1	5	8	3	9	6	7
5	9	8	2	6	7	4	3	1
6	7	3	1	4	9	5	8	2
9	8	6	7	3	2	1	5	4
7	4	2	6	5	1	3	9	8
3	1	5	4	9	8	7	2	6
1	3	9	8	2	4	6	7	5
8	5	7	3	1	6	2	4	9
2	6	4	9	7	5	8	1	3

Crossword

Across

- 1. Sneaker brand
- 5. Wind direction indicator
- 9. Big yellow taxi, say
- 12. Rocker Billy
- 13. Buyer-beware warning
- 14. First of the cardinals
- 15. Puritans
- 17. Cape or fish
- 18. Cure rawhide
- 19. Mary Ann ___ (George Eliot)
- 21. Intertwined
- 24. Tree hugger?
- 26. In days of yore
- 27. Barbara who played Jeannie the genie
- 29. Bulletin board affixer
- 33. Comfortable shirt
- 34. Goat doe
- 36. Debate side
- 37. Whirl
- 39. Pretext
- 40. Stock response
- 41. Part of A.M.
- 43. Skilled
- 45. Goofy
- 48. Get snooty
- 49. Violet or lavender
- 50. Like barbecue meat
- 56. Discovery in a seam
- 57. Chart
- 58. Bits
- 59. Acorn's source
- 60. Takes up
- 61. In-box filler

Down

- 1. Vigor go-with

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8		9	10	11
12					13					14		
15				16						17		
			18					19	20			
21	22	23				24	25					
26				27	28				29	30	31	32
33				34				35		36		
37			38		39					40		
			41	42					43	44		
45	46	47					48					
49				50	51	52				53	54	55
56				57					58			
59				60						61		

© Lovatts Puzzles

- 2. Needless fuss
- 3. Opposite of sou'
- 4. Pool-table material
- 5. Ostentatious
- 6. Pack animal
- 7. Kind of wit or pick
- 8. "To eat," in German
- 9. Andean shrub
- 10. Shortly, to Shakespeare
- 11. Places for retirees?
- 16. Saddled
- 20. Examine thoroughly
- 21. Stressful way to run
- 22. Antique
- 23. Mixed school
- 24. Event location
- 25. Motels' predecessors
- 28. Tailor's tuck
- 30. Wile E. Coyote's favorite company
- 31. Cheep joint?
- 32. Shoelace difficulty
- 35. Suffer with hope
- 38. Talk foolishly
- 42. Immature insect
- 44. Linked pairs
- 45. Wave away
- 46. Mystical glow
- 47. Quick look
- 48. Holds down
- 51. Ginger ___ (soda choice)
- 52. PC storage acronym
- 53. Hardly hit
- 54. Pilot's calculation
- 55. Reservoir maker