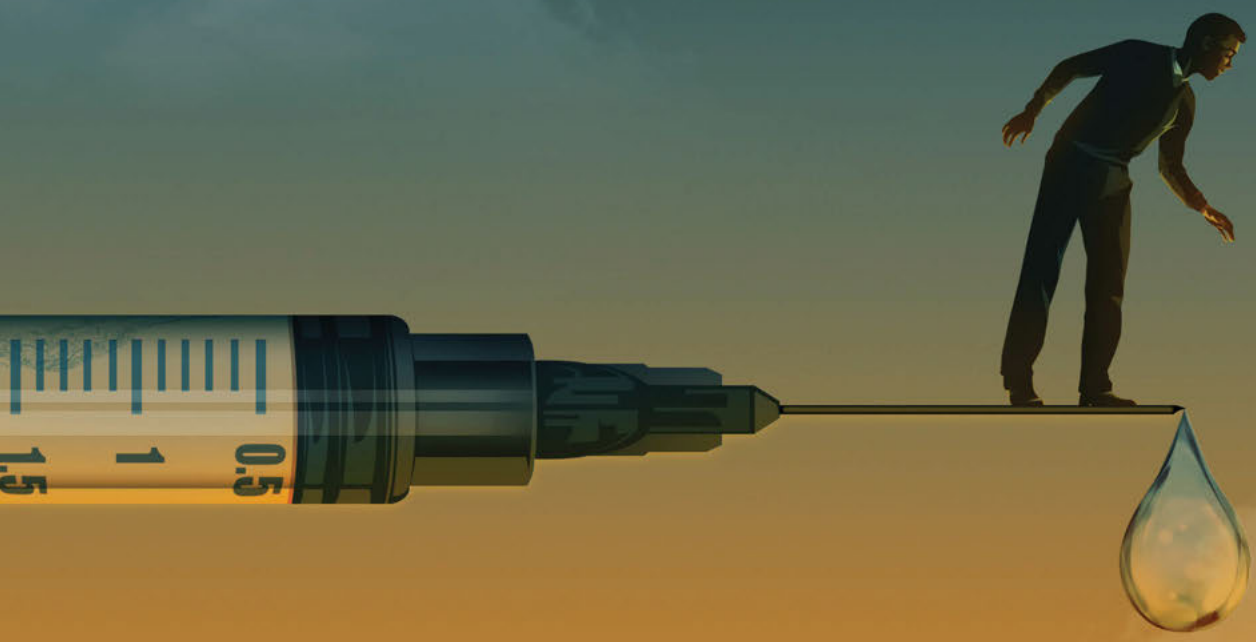
WORLD

EARNING YOUR TRUST, EVERY DAY / APRIL 8, 2023

SHOT IN THE DARK

Three years after COVID lockdowns began, experts reassess the vaccine campaign *p. 42*

by EMMA FREIRE



CRIME AND PUNISHMENT: ISIS WIVES COME HOME *by Jenny Lind Schmitt*

MINNESOTA NONPROFIT AIDS UKRAINIAN AMPUTEES *by Sharon Dierberger*

SPORTS: REAL WOMEN MAKE A STAND *by Ray Hacke*

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ON THE COVER: *Illustration by Taylor Callery*

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CEO NOTES



WITH THIS ISSUE of WORLD Magazine comes an anniversary of sorts: For the past seven years, I've been sharing notes about WORLD in this column—our history, our people, our projects, our plans, and our challenges. I hope these small interactions have been helpful to you.

Along the way, I've also occasionally used this space to encourage readers with Scripture. The cover date of this issue falls on the Saturday between Good Friday and Easter, so it seems appropriate to include Biblical encouragement today. Consider these verses from 1 Peter:

"May grace and peace be multiplied to you. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials" (1 Peter 1:2b-6).

Peter's comment that "now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials" may seem like classic understatement. It isn't. Paul does the same thing in 1 Corinthians when he refers to the wasting away of our bodies as "momentary light affliction." In both instances, the two apostles aren't downplaying our difficulties. Rather, they are magnifying our inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading—or as Paul puts it, "an eternal weight of glory."

The key here, then, is that while we can all relate to suffering, we also should relate to rejoicing—in our new birth to a living hope.

There's a reason that living hope is something we talk about quite a bit here at WORLD. Because we've been called to the news business, feeling grieved by "various trials" is an occupational hazard. Some of the trials are the stuff of our news and opinion coverage. Some of them are inherent in day-to-day management of a news-media enterprise.

These trials are more than enough to fill our days. I hope to encourage not only our readers, but our own staff, by comparing these momentary light afflictions with the gift God has given us through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

He is risen, indeed!

Kevin

KEVIN MARTIN
kevin@wng.org

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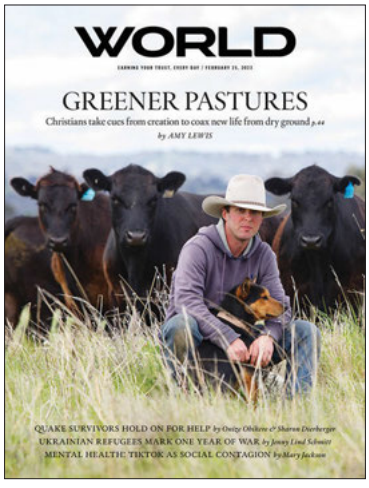
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MAILBAG



FEBRUARY 25, 2023

Cultivating community *p44*
Fifty years ago, my family spent several months as guests of a Bruderhof community in the United States while between pastorates. Even though we never joined, our lives were deeply touched by the experience.

RICHARD PURCHASE
Holiday, Fla.

Your article was a textbook example of greenwashing. Farming cows for meat is the least sustainable type of food production on the planet—contributing more greenhouse gas emissions and requiring more water and land than any other food source. If you care about creation and biomimicry, interview scientists and environmentalists, not cowboys and animal farmers.

GINA HINTON
Gig Harbor, Wash.

I was thrilled to read the article describing regenerative agriculture practices and their fundamental basis as fulfilling God's command to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. We need more education about this and more practitioners of it.

BENJAMIN MICHAEL
Seale, Ala.

Kudos to Amy Lewis for getting it right. As Christ-following farmers, we have a sacred responsibility to regenerate both our soil communities and our human neighbor communities. To paraphrase G.K. Chesterton: As our understanding increases, we become smaller.

VERNON PETERSON
Kingsburg, Calif.

Everything together *p72*
If Amy Lewis could not categorically say after her three-day visit that the Danthonia Bruderhof community is not a cult, then why do such a lengthy article, especially when she could only question "approved people"? There were many unanswered questions and troubling remarks made by Lewis and community members.

ELIZABETH KIESLE
Temple, Texas

Lighten up! *p42*
I liked how Janie B. Cheaney noted that God has a sense of humor, as displayed in the case of Sarah and Abraham. It is important to not take ourselves too seriously, and humor distinguishes us from the animals. It puts a shine on misery, brings us joy, and lifts our spirits.

RICHARD LOMBARD
Columbus, Ohio

Painfully hip or too big to fail? *p26*
I don't get the "He Gets Us" Jesus. If a 30-second sound bite to get a message out is the goal, they would be better off showing a screen that says, "He Died for Us." That's a sound bite with teeth.

LIZ SMITH
Baton Rouge, La.

Social sickness *p52*
Sometimes my heart wants to despair of God's mercy after reading articles like this one. Having teenage grandkids, we intercede for them daily for protection in body, mind, and spirit. If God had not given us the hope to "take heart, because I have overcome the world," where else could we find peace?

SHARI HULCY
Romeo, Mich.

I found Mary Jackson's article fascinating and terrifying.

SARAH COLLEN
Omaha, Neb.

How does the U.S. monitor airspace violations? *p22*
I suggest you give credit to the Navy photographer who took the photograph used for this article: Petty Officer 1st Class Tyler Thompson. The U.S. military has dedicated photographers who capture imagery to ensure Americans know and understand their military while creating a historical record.

U.S. NAVY LT. CMDR.
JAVAN W. RASNAKE
The Pentagon, Arlington, Va.

Corrections
Jesus suffered on the cross for six hours ("Lighten up!" Feb. 25, p. 42).

Natalyn Joyner was wrongly identified as a psychologist in her letter to the editor (Mailbag, March 11, p. 8).

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VOICES **JOEL BELZ**

Character counts

Is it a missing ingredient in our economy?

This is the 15th in a series of classic columns (edited for space) by Joel Belz. Joel wrote this column amid an economic crisis for the Oct. 4, 2008, issue of WORLD.

THREE DECADES AGO MY FATHER, several of my brothers, and I sat with Presley Edwards, the retired top man at the A.G. Edwards brokerage firm, to quiz him over breakfast on some of the main things he had learned during his years in business. "Two things come to my mind," he mused. "First, find more start-up money than you ever think you'll need. Figure as closely as you can what it'll take. Double that. Double that again. Multiply that by 10. And then pray that you have enough."

And second? "Hire the smartest people you possibly can. Don't stint on that."

That's the conversation that would stick most in my mind when the stock markets start gyrating—except for another conversation I had 20 years later with Presley Edwards' son Ben. Ben Edwards was chairman of the board and CEO of A.G. Edwards as that company grew into the only Top 10 brokerage not headquartered in New York. It was often the Edwards' willingness to go against the crowd that led to so much of its success.

When I told Ben Edwards about my earlier conversation with his father, he laughed. "I can imagine Dad saying that," he said. "And I'd still agree with his first point. But I'd have to adjust his second one. These days, we can hire all the smart young people we want. These days, we have to look a whole lot harder for character."

What a difference a generation makes. "The temptations are so much bigger," he went on, "and the moral ability to handle them seems so much more limited."

That was 10 years ago. So I called Ben Edwards again last week, and we talked about whether the current economic earthquake is mostly about failure of know-how, failure of character, or something altogether different.

I was surprised and impressed how reluctant this former boss to 14,000 people was to point his finger at others. Instead, he modestly illustrated how easily power goes to someone's head. "If you're a CEO ... that means you've got good people in charge of every area of your business—leaving you with not a heck of a lot to do. So what do you do? You feel embarrassed because you're the highest paid person and you ought to be doing important things. So you downsize, or you acquire or be acquired, or do any of these things that make the front page of the financial papers. When I'd get tempted like that and everything was going smoothly, I'd go out and do something unimportant until I got over it. But I've seen it happen with a lot of CEOs."

Or, Ben pointed out, "your company's making a lot of money...and you start thinking that you're smart and you're responsible. You take credit—when actually it's the little people who are doing the grunt work that are really making or losing your money—and maybe in spite of your bad decisions!"

This, I thought, is exactly the kind of character that we so much need but see so little of these days. This veteran of high finance opposes repeated government bailouts, defies anybody "to show where the government's running something has made it better," and scorns the scandalous "good-ole' Charlie" bonuses so many companies have offered non-performing executives.

But still he looks at himself, saying he's been guilty of greed, and that "the most dishonest thing is when we justify something in our heart by saying that everybody's doing it."

Here's the kicker. The A.G. Edwards firm is no more. After Ben Edwards' retirement and against his protests, the company was sold in 2007 to Wachovia. And now Wachovia is reeling, its stock only a fifth what it was two years ago. So does Ben Edwards, also being treated these days for life-threatening cancer, feel like Job? "Not at all," he says with gusto. "I've had way more blessings than anyone I know. I'm a blessed man."

Today, it wasn't a smart market analysis I needed. I needed a real live example of the kind of character that makes any economy strong. But it's in short supply. ■

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QUICK TAKES



Members of Women's March protest outside the federal courthouse in Amarillo.

IN THE NEWS

Abortion pill battle

A court challenge could block a major abortion drug

by SHARON DIERBERGER

PRO-ABORTION GROUPS are bracing for a ruling by a federal judge that could drastically change the way abortions are performed. And they aren't happy.

On March 15 in Amarillo, Texas, U.S. District Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk heard arguments in a lawsuit that seeks to block the abortion drug mifepristone. Attorneys representing the pro-life Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine filed the suit against the Food and Drug Administration in November.

In so-called "medication" abortions, a pill containing mifepristone blocks the hormone progesterone and prevents continuation of a pregnancy. Medication abortions account for more than half of all abortions in the United States. Alliance Defending Freedom attorneys who argued the case have asked the judge for a preliminary injunction which could block the pills from use even in states where abortion is legal while litigation continues.

"This will be all-out war" for pro-abortion activists, said Carol Tobias, president of the National Right to Life Committee.

The pro-abortion Women's March loudly protested the lawsuit outside the Amarillo courthouse in February and March, waving signs that read "Bigger Than Roe." Some carried babies. Kacsmaryk's staff has reported death threats to the court, the judge, and his family, including a phone message declaring, "You will have to eat the flesh of your sons, you will have to eat the flesh of your daughters. I will kill you with a sword."

The lawsuit says the FDA exceeded its authority in 2000 when it approved mifepristone—originally known as RU-486—for abortions. The agency had used a process meant for approving treatments of serious or life-threatening diseases like cancer. But pregnancy isn't an illness, says the suit, which also asserts the FDA did not study the pill's safety for abortion.

The U.S. Justice Department, which is defending the FDA, countered that pregnancy can be a serious or life-threatening condition for some women.

As far back as 2002, plaintiff organizations asked the FDA to reverse its approval in a citizens petition, which is required before bringing suit. Fourteen years later, the FDA rejected the petition, and those that followed.

A medication abortion uses a drug series of mifepristone and misoprostol to kill an unborn baby and expel its body. Failure rates range from 4.5 to 10 percent. Failure →

means hemorrhaging, retained baby body parts, or ruptured ectopic pregnancy. These complications may lead to surgery, injury, illness, or death—problems significantly underreported by the FDA, according to research compiled in the peer-reviewed journal, *Issues in Law & Medicine*.

Misoprostol can also be used alone to end pregnancies as an off-label use, but carries at least double the risk of failure.

Pro-life activist Abby Johnson predicted that even if Judge Kacsmaryk rules against mifepristone, abortions won't decrease: "The abortion industry will just start providing misoprostol-only abortions."

The abortion-supporting American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists confirmed this, announcing it would recommend doctors provide misoprostol alone, even though it's less effective than mifepristone and an extra dose and follow-up might be necessary.

The Guttmacher Institute said providers would offer misoprostol-only abortions and continue surgical abortions. But the pro-abortion research group fears the number of women seeking abortions would plummet.

Pro-life advocates note women cannot reverse an abortion after taking misoprostol, whereas women taking the mifepristone pill early in pregnancy may have a 24-48 hour window to change their minds.

Six other pro-abortion organizations, including Planned Parenthood, did not return my calls or emails. The Aid Access website encourages women to order abortion pills now, even before they are pregnant. Walgreens won't comment on the case in Amarillo, but told me it would dispense misoprostol where legal, and will seek certification to dispense mifepristone wherever it is legal.

In response to the lawsuit, 12 states with Democratic attorney generals sued the FDA in February. They claim the FDA has burdensome mifepristone regulations they want lifted to make it easier to access abortion pills, calling them safer than Tylenol.

No matter how the Texas judge rules, an appeal is likely. That would send the case to the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, and potentially to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Should the judge block the pill, Dr. Anthony Levatino, a former abortionist turned pro-life advocate, said pro-abortion groups will be angry.

"Their response may surpass their reaction to the *Dobbs* decision," he said, referring to last year's Supreme Court ruling overturning *Roe v. Wade*.

"Any restrictions on abortions makes pro-abortion groups furious—they see it as eroding abortion rights ... even though banning mifepristone won't stop abortion," added Johnson. "We need *all* medication abortions to end." ■

"Any restrictions on abortions makes pro-abortion groups furious ... even though banning mifepristone won't stop abortion."



Used boxes of mifepristone pills fill a trash can at Alamo Women's Clinic in Albuquerque, N.M.

EVLEYN HOCKSTEIN/REUTERS/ALAMY



BY THE NUMBERS

Insulin savings

Lower prices will give financial relief to Americans living with diabetes

by JOHN DAWSON

$160

The approximate price of a five-pack of Humalog insulin pens beginning in October, down from a current retail price of $530.40. Eli Lilly announced the 70 percent price cut March 1 for the drug after the Biden administration pressured drugmakers to slash prices.

8.4 million

The number of Americans who use insulin to manage diabetes, according to the American Diabetes Association.

99%

The increase in personal spending on insulin—from $1,432 to $2,853 per year—between 2012 and 2016 for patients with health insurance, according to an analysis by the Rand Corporation.

1 in 5

The number of Americans who rationed their insulin, skipping or delaying doses in order to manage costs, according to a 2021 study published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

ILLUSTRATION BY KRIEG BARRIE; FOSBURY: AP; REDDICK: RICH POLK/GETTY IMAGES FOR IMDB

Dick Fosbury

An Olympic champion whose unorthodox high jump technique revolutionized the sport, Fosbury died March 12 at age 76. An unimpressive high jumper at his Portland, Ore., high school, Fosbury began experimenting with his form when he was 16. Most jumpers at the time employed a straddle technique, crossing the bar while face down. But Fosbury's experiments led him to an angled approach that left his back arching over the bar. Eventually he found success with his back-down jump, earning a place on Oregon State's track team and then a spot in the 1968 Olympics. There, in Mexico City, his successful jump of 7 feet, 4¼ inches earned him a gold medal and a new Olympic record. The Oregon jumper didn't make the 1972 Olympic team, but most who did adopted his technique, dubbed the Fosbury Flop.



Lance Reddick

Reddick, a television and movie actor whose screen presence made him a natural for playing cops and other authority figures, died March 17. He was 60. As a child in Baltimore, Reddick focused on music, eventually earning a music degree from the University of Rochester. He used a graduate program at Yale to transition into acting. After landing recurring roles on *Oz* and *Law & Order*, Reddick earned a starring role as an ambitious police lieutenant on HBO's *The Wire*. In film, he was perhaps best known for his portrayal of a concierge and fixer named Charon in the John Wick movies.



Cyclone Freddy strikes twice





Georgia Parliamentary debate devolved into fistfights, and protests raged in the capital of Tbilisi after the ruling party introduced a law cracking down on aid groups. The Georgian Dream party dropped the "foreign agent" proposal after two days of national upheaval, but opponents warn pro-Moscow politicians will try again. The law would require special registration for organizations that get more than 20 percent of their funds from abroad. Critics say the bill is based on a similar 2012 Russian law used to crack down on nongovernmental organizations and press freedom. *—Jenny Lind Schmitt*



POPULATION
3.7 million

LANGUAGE
Georgian, Azeri, Armenian, Russian

RELIGION
83% Orthodox, 10% Muslim, 3% Armenian Apostolic

GOVERNANCE
Semi-presidential republic

GDP
$57.43 billion

MAJOR EXPORTS
Copper, cars, iron alloys, wine, packaged medicines

Malawi A deadly cyclone made a second landfall in Southern Africa in March and killed more than 500 people. Cyclone Freddy first lashed Madagascar on Feb. 21 before moving to Mozambique and back across the Indian Ocean. On March 11, it struck Mozambique for a second time before drenching neighboring Malawi. The storm brought flooding and landslides and washed away homes and roads. Malawi declared 14 days of national mourning for the 430 citizens it lost. Authorities expect the death toll to climb. Malawi and Mozambique were already battling cholera outbreaks ahead of the storm. Weather experts were trying to determine whether Freddy was the longest-lasting tropical cyclone on record. *—Onize Ohikere*



FACT BOX SOURCES: THE WORLD FACTBOOK-CIA/WORLD BANK; GEORGIA: ZURAB TSERTSVADZE/AP; MALAWI: THOKO CHIKONDI/AP



Micronesia President **David Panuelo** claims China is engaging in "political warfare." In a leaked letter dated March 9, Panuelo warned China is interfering in Micronesia in an effort to ensure it would align with Beijing and not Washington, or at least remain neutral, if war breaks out over Taiwan. China wants to regain control of Taiwan, an island that has operated as a self-ruled democracy since 1949. According to Panuelo, China's tactics in Micronesia include surveillance and bribing elected officials. Panuelo, whose term ends in May, suggested switching diplomatic allegiance from China to Taiwan. *—Erica Kwong*

Iran A pastor jailed for eight months will get a new trial. The lawyer representing Joseph Shahbazian learned about the decision from Iran's supreme court on March 13. Officers with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps seized the Armenian-Iranian pastor and several members of his house church in 2020. Shahbazian began serving a 10-year sentence in Tehran's infamous Evin prison last August on charges of forming illegal organizations that threaten national security. Iran recognizes Christianity as a minority religion but harshly regulates churches and forbids proselytization. A lower court rejected Shahbazian's first appeal. But the supreme court ruled his sentence was "not appropriate" and granted him a retrial—with the possibility of a lighter sentence. *—Elizabeth Russell*



POPULATION
87.6 million

LANGUAGE
Persian Farsi

RELIGION
99.6% Muslim

GOVERNANCE
Theocratic republic

GDP
$1.32 trillion

MAJOR EXPORTS
Petroleum, polymers, industrial alcohols, iron, pistachios

Netherlands A party representing the interests of farmers scored a major electoral victory on March 15. The Farmer-Citizen Movement (BBB) is projected to take 17 of 75 seats to become the largest party in the Dutch Parliament's upper house. BBB formed in 2019 in opposition to government plans to reduce nitrogen emissions in part by closing farms. "Voters are showing they are fed up with this policy. They want to be heard and seen," BBB leader Caroline van der Plas told Dutch media after the vote. Dutch farmers have protested against the government's plans sporadically for four years. Other European countries, including Germany, Spain, and Poland, have targeted their farming sectors with climate-change policies and have also seen protests in response. *—Emma Freire*



POPULATION
17.5 million

LANGUAGE
Dutch

RELIGION
54% none, 20% Roman Catholic, 15% Protestant, 5% Muslim

GOVERNANCE
Parliamentary constitutional monarchy

GDP
$992.67 billion

MAJOR EXPORTS
Petroleum

Colombia An explosion in a coal mine 45 miles north of Bogotá killed 21 miners on March 14. Ten of the victims who survived the explosion died after rescuers failed to reach them before their oxygen ran out. For decades, an average of 103 miners have died each year in the South American country. That doesn't include those lost in illegal open pit and underground coal and gold mining operations that help fund armed groups. Colombia has more than half of Latin America's coal reserves. President Gustavo Petro, elected in June, blamed worker fatalities on business, social, and government failures. He has called coal a poison and vowed to transfer mining jobs to the agricultural, clean energy, and tourism sectors. *—Amy Lewis*



MICRONESIA: KAZUKI OISHI/SIPA USA VIA AP; COLOMBIA: IVAN VALENCIA/AP



U.S. BRIEFS

Tightening reins on teenage social media

Utah The Legislature passed two bills March 13 that require social media companies to verify the age of any Utah resident younger than 18 who opens an account, and also to obtain consent from the teen's parent or guardian. The bills prohibit social media companies from showing minors' accounts in search results or targeting ads to youth. Companies also must limit youth from accessing their accounts at night and may not use any design or feature that causes addiction in a minor. The state's consumer protection division will investigate complaints and levy fines or pursue civil penalties against violators. Electronic freedom advocates say requiring parental access is a threat to privacy and free speech. Gov. **Spencer Cox** said he planned to sign both bills, which would take effect in March 2024. Cox downplayed First Amendment concerns by noting the coexistence of constitutional guarantees and laws that prevent children from buying guns. "This is something that's killing our kids," he said. *—Todd Vician*

POPULATION
3.2 million

GOVERNOR
Spencer Cox*

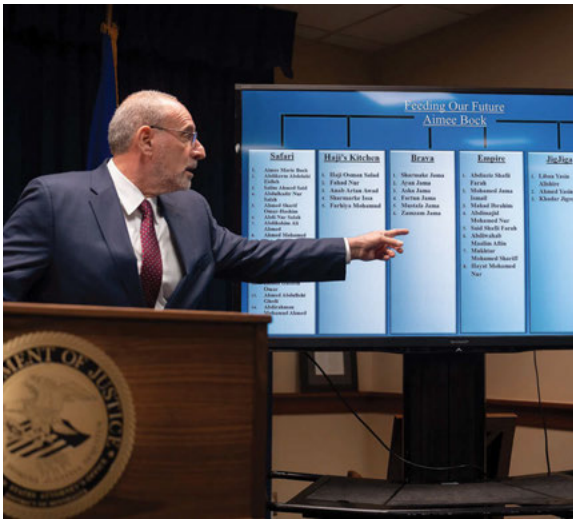
U.S. SENATORS
Mike Lee*, Mitt Romney*

INDUSTRY
Coal mining, cattle ranching, salt production, government services

Missouri Lawmakers in the city of Union on March 13 voted to change their hiring policies in order to address a shortage of seasonal employees. This summer, 14-year-olds can apply for jobs as lifeguards, concession stand workers, and day camp counselors, ending a policy that previously required city employees to be at least 15. Fourteen is the minimum age for employment for nonagricultural jobs under federal child labor laws. Federal rules also restrict the hours youth under the age of 16 can work and prohibit anyone under the age of 18 from hazardous employment. Ohio senators recently approved a bill that would enable 14- and 15-year-olds to work longer on school nights: Currently, 13 states allow teens under 16 to work until 9 p.m. year-round. *—Kim Henderson*

Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear on March 16 signed a bill, effective July 1, to ban so-called "gray" gaming machines installed in bars, restaurants, and truck stops throughout the state. Players pull a lever or press a button to get at least two matching icons before manually changing one to get three in a row. The games' manufacturer says that feature makes the machines games of skill, meaning they aren't covered by the state's gambling laws that outlaw games of chance such as traditional slot machines. Bill sponsor Rep. Killian Timoney calls the machines "gray machines" because they don't fit neatly into current regulations. Opponents of the bill said the games benefit small businesses that don't have to pay taxes on the money generated by the machines. *—Lauren Canterberry*

*DEMOCRAT / *REPUBLICAN / *INDEPENDENT; SOURCES: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU AND WORLD ATLAS



Minnesota U.S. Attorney **Andrew Luger** announced March 13 that investigators have charged 10 more people in the nation's largest pandemic-aid fraud case. Now a total of 60 Minnesotans stand accused of claiming over $250 million in federal reimbursements for a fraudulent nonprofit, Feeding Our Future. The defendants, including smaller nonprofit operators and food distributors, claimed to have served millions of meals to hungry children while schools were closed—but federal investigators found very few meals were ever served. Luger said the accused ran "a brazen scheme of staggering proportions." Some of them didn't even have a physical kitchen or location for food distribution and turned in lists of fake aid recipients. The defendants allegedly pocketed the reimbursements from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. One even bought 37 acres of land and an airplane. Trials began last year. So far, six people have pleaded guilty, and the government has seized $66.6 million in assets from those implicated in the fraud. *—Elizabeth Russell*

Virginia A top-ranked public high school has collected over $1 million from groups that represent Chinese interests. Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, part of Virginia's Fairfax County Public Schools, has received donations since 2014 from groups including Tsinghua University High School, which has ties to the Chinese military. Parents Defending Education, a grassroots nonprofit, on March 7 published information about the donations, used for a renovation project. In response, Virginia Secretary of Education Aimee Rogstad Guidera wrote to the school district's superintendent, insisting that such donations cease. "I have asked the Virginia Department of Education to investigate the prevalence of such relationships between [Chinese Communist Party]-linked partners and local school divisions across the Commonwealth," she added. *—Emma Freire*

POPULATION
8.5 million

GOVERNOR
Glenn Youngkin*

U.S. SENATORS
Mark Warner*, Tim Kaine*

INDUSTRY
Service, tech, agriculture and forestry, fishing



Alabama A Dothan megachurch voted in early March to break away from the United Methodist Church over concerns about a theological drift from Biblical sexuality. The 2,600-member Covenant United Methodist Church is only the latest to seek disaffiliation from the global denomination. More than 6 percent of UMC churches in the United States, or 1,960 congregations, have received permission to disaffiliate since 2019, according to denominational figures. Under a current UMC disaffiliation plan, churches have until the end of this year to exit the denomination without losing their properties. Covenant UMC Senior Pastor Kyle Gatlin told the Christian Post that the church's reason for leaving included bishops failing to enforce the denomination's rules prohibiting ordination of homosexual clergy or blessing of same-sex marriages. Covenant UMC leaders recommended the church instead join the newly formed, theologically conservative Global Methodist Church. *—Mary Jackson*

UTAH: RICK BOWMER/AP; MINNESOTA: GLEN STUBBE/STAR TRIBUNE VIA AP; VIRGINIA: JOHN M. CHASE/ALAMY

BACKGROUNDER

Are U.S. railroads safe?

by CAROLINA LUMETTA



Portions of a derailed Norfolk Southern freight train burn in East Palestine.

RESIDENTS OF East Palestine, Ohio, are still dealing with the cleanup after a 2-mile-long freight train derailed while carrying hazardous chemicals in the middle of town. A National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigation is putting Norfolk Southern Railway in a harsh spotlight, exposing regulatory loopholes that could have contributed to the accident. Here's more about railroad safety:

How often do derailments occur? In 1978, the nation logged about 8,500 derailments. In 2022, the Federal Railroad Administration reported only 1,164, with human error and track defects as leading causes.

What are railroad temperature detectors? These devices, also called hot boxes, are situated along the tracks to take temperature readings. A preliminary NTSB report found an overheated wheel bearing to be the cause of Norfolk Southern's derailed 32N train. One reading taken 30 miles outside East Palestine found the bearing only 38 degrees Fahrenheit above ambient temperature. The next detector 11 miles down the track recorded 103 degrees above ambient temperature, and security cameras showed flames under the cars. The next detector was 19 miles away—just outside East Palestine—at which point the bearing was 253 degrees above ambient. The crew pulled emergency brakes, but it was too late to stop the cars from jumping the tracks.

What is Norfolk Southern doing to improve track safety? The company promised to consider adding more sensors along routes "where practical." Executives anticipate installing 200 over the next year. But few federal regulations require them to do so. The NTSB serves only in an advisory capacity: Railroads can decide whether to use detectors, how far apart to space them, and what temperatures are acceptable. Norfolk Southern detectors issue a noncritical alert between 170 and 200 degrees above ambient.

Who knew about the chemicals on 32N? Federal rules require railroads to alert state emergency departments when a train has at least 20 consecutive cars carrying Class 3 flammable liquids, including benzene. But among the tanks carrying hazardous materials on 32N, only two had benzene, and one other had Class 3 liquids. That's not to say there was no tracking. First responders monitor trains through a safety app called AskRail, which tracked 32N.

What is "precision scheduled railroading"? It's a general practice companies have adopted in recent years to lengthen trains, shorten inspection times, and speed up deliveries. Executives call it a cost-efficient measure, but union leaders claim it leads to understaffing and human error. A 2022 Government Accountability Office report found that the seven major freight railroads have cut staff by 28 percent since 2011 and lengthened trains. The GAO did not say whether the changes contributed to accidents. ■

GENE J. PUSKAR/AP

QUOTABLES

"There's no rescue team, no police officer, any government official. Only ordinary people, people that lost people."

DAVID PHIRI, a resident of Malawi, describing to Al Jazeera his search for family members missing in the wake of Cyclone Freddy. The storm killed at least 500 people in Africa in February and March (see p.16).

"Apparently, I am the wrong kind of black."

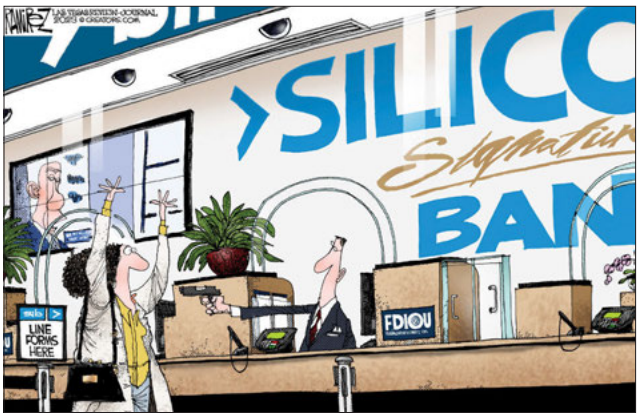
TABIA LEE, who said she was being terminated as faculty director for the Office of Equity, Social Justice, and Multicultural Education at De Anza College in Cupertino, Calif., for resisting progressive "orthodoxy" regarding anti-racism and racial equity.

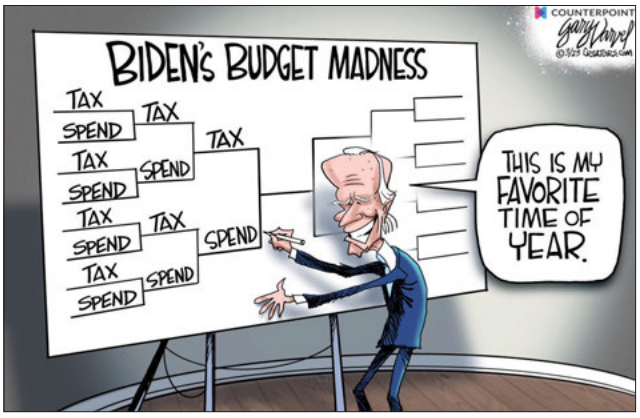
"A lack of love, of brotherhood, of hugs and embraces."

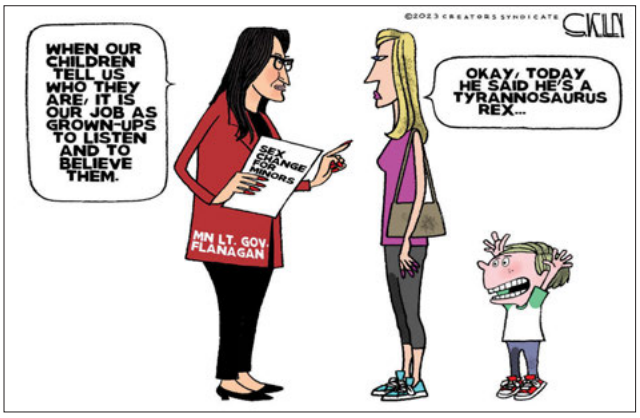
Mexican President ANDRÉS MANUEL LÓPEZ OBRADOR, naming on March 17 what he believes to be the cause of the fentanyl overdose crisis in the U.S. He also blamed "disintegration of families."

"My journey started on a boat. I spent a year in a refugee camp. ... Somehow I ended up here on Hollywood's biggest stage."

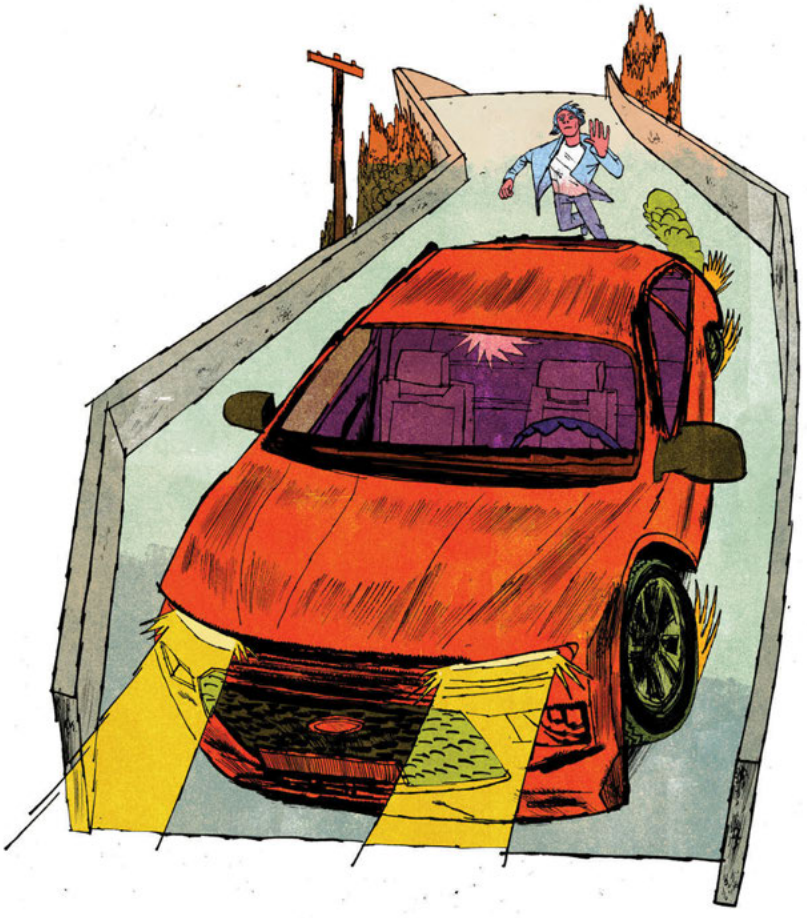
KE HUY QUAN, 51, in his acceptance speech lauding the American Dream after winning the Oscar for best supporting actor in *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. Quan and his family fled Vietnam's communist revolution in the 1970s.











QUICK TAKES

No more repo agents?

Car company's novel patent would target delinquent loan customers

by JOHN DAWSON

IN THE FUTURE, if customers don't pay their Ford vehicle loans on time, the car might repossess itself. Ford Global Technologies filed a patent application with the United States government in 2021 for a system that Ford could use to direct automobiles back to a specified parking lot for repossession in the event of nonpayment. According to the patent application, which was made public in February, the system under development would lead nonpaying customers through a series of escalations, such as having the car's audio system play unpleasant sounds until a payment is made. According to the patent, Ford could also remotely lock owners out of their vehicles. As a final option, the company imagines using self-driving technology to remove the vehicle from private property so the lender could reclaim it.

Passport problem

A group of British teenagers had to extend their U.S. vacation after their New Hampshire hotel tossed out their passports. More than 40 students from Barr Beacon School in Walsall, U.K., had been skiing on a school trip to New Hampshire when hotel workers accidentally threw 41 of their passports into a dumpster whose contents were later destroyed. School staffers had to extend the trip by four days and work with the British Embassy to expedite their return. While waiting for emergency passports, the students toured New York City with school chaperones before flying back home March 1.



Feline superhero

First responders are crediting a cat for helping to find a man who fell over a waterfall. Family of the Pleasant Valley, Calif., man noticed he was missing Feb. 21. While searching, the unidentified man's wife and some neighbors heard repeated meows from the family's outdoor cat. The cat meowed until the search party arrived at the very place the missing man had tumbled down a 30-foot seasonal waterfall. Emergency crews found the man in the creek below and took him by helicopter to the hospital.

ILLUSTRATION BY MATT ROTA; CAT: ISTOCK

Not a hill of beans

Someone spilled the beans. Authorities in Greene County, Tenn., responded to the scene of an overturned tractor-trailer Feb. 27 along an East Tennessee highway. Emergency crews found the roadway and shoulder blanketed with gallon-sized cans of Bush's Baked Beans. The cache had departed a Bush's facility earlier that day. According to a county spokesperson, the trailer's entire 51,000-pound load ended up on the road after the trailer tipped over when the driver struck a utility pole.





Powder puzzle

A mysterious powder wafted into parts of West Virginia the evening of Feb. 23 and covered cars and outdoor surfaces with a dry film by morning. The anomaly, which was most pronounced in the state's panhandle, prompted complaints to state authorities, who initiated an investigation. In response to online speculation, a Department of Environmental Protection spokesperson said there was no evidence linking the West Virginia powder to the earlier derailment of a train carrying toxic chemicals in Ohio. By Feb. 27, state environmental officials announced the mysterious powder was simply pollen produced by local plants.

Time for the moon

With a growing number of lunar missions scheduled in the next few years, the European Space Agency said it's time for the moon to get its own time. ESA navigation system engineer Pietro Giordano announced in February plans to create a specific time zone for Earth's only natural satellite. Keeping time on the moon creates some logistical challenges. Because of the moon's lower gravity, clocks run faster there, gaining 56 microseconds per day compared to terrestrial clocks. After 50 years, a moon clock would race a full second ahead of an Earth clock. Giordano said establishing official moon time would require an international effort.



"Those who try it are very enthusiastic."

Insect bites



Most Germans like vanilla and chocolate ice cream. But the proprietor of Eiscafé Rino, a small ice cream shop in southern Germany, has bet that some Germans will adopt a taste for insects. **Thomas Micolino**, who has a history of interesting offerings at his Rottenburg am Neckar ice cream parlor, recently introduced a new cricket-flavored scoop. Micolino said sales have been brisk thus far: "Those who try it are very enthusiastic. I have customers who come here every day and buy a scoop." Micolino said he uses cricket flour to flavor the ice cream and serves a scoop with dried whole crickets on the top.

BEANS: GREENE COUNTY EMA; POLLEN: ISTOCK; MOON: NASA; ICE CREAM: MARIJAN MURAT/DPA VIA AP



VOICES **LYNN VINCENT**

Storm warning

Official persecution of American Christians has shown its leading edge

PLEASE FORGIVE ME FOR THIS, my second Debbie Downer column in a row. Last issue I wrote about hell. This issue, I'm writing about Marxists running public schools. Which, as a topic, may be somewhat redundant, since Marxism breeds eternal misery wherever it festers.

Right now, it's festering in Arizona.

You may already have read about the rift between the Washington Elementary School District (WESD) and Arizona Christian University (ACU). For 11 years, ACU provided student teachers for the district's 32 schools. But in February, WESD severed ties with the university, citing ACU's Biblical views on marriage and gender.

Board member Tamillia Valenzuela said such views may make LGBTQ children feel unsafe. ACU said the district's actions violate the First Amendment, and sued. It's another public education Free Exercise clash—but what's different is the soft-sell Marxism driving this one, at least in part—so soft that it's literally warm and fuzzy.

Of the five WESD board members, it's Valenzuela who has garnered the most attention. That's not surprising since her official school board photo shows her hair streaked green and a pair of fuzzy cat ears strapped to her head. Kind of cute, though, right? Might appeal to the kids. Was the whole WESD board going for a fun, accessible vibe, I wondered?

No, other members' photos are quite traditional, with bios that list degrees, professional credentials, and their views on education. Valenzuela, however, describes herself as a "bilingual, disabled, neurodivergent Queer Black Latina" who is a mom, "community organizer and activist" and loves seeing others "lean into their power."

Well, OK, I thought, maybe she's a hardworking mom and when asked to write a bio, she didn't know what to do but dump the woke lexicon into a Salad Shooter and turn the crank. I decided to read on.

Valenzuela "loves a good hot wing (but only with the right ranch)," her bio says, "and things that sparkle."

Aaaw. She's approachable, right? Just folks.

No, not really. Remember the views-on-education part of board members' bios? Board president Nikkie Gomez-Whaley writes: "Education can expand minds, open doors, and change lives." Board member Kyle Clayton writes: "A quality public school system creates healthy citizens, resilient communities, and a strong economy."

But Valenzuela offers an oddly militant view: "To build community requires vigilant awareness of the work we must continually do to undermine all the socialization that leads us to behave in ways that perpetuate domination."

Huh? Of all she might say about education, why quote the leftist, feminist writer Bell Hooks? Here's the way I clocked it: Education is to Valenzuela as the Batista regime was to Che Guevara—an institution so riddled with exploitative, socially constructed, bourgeoisie values that it must be overthrown.

If that sounds like a leap, consider this: In October 2022, NBC News reported that over the past year, "dozens of progressive activist organizations and political action committees have launched or reoriented themselves to counter conservatives who have brought the fight over culture war issues to school board races."

An example: Run for Something recruits candidates "who will advocate for progressive values now and for the next 30 years." Since 2017, the group has recruited 100,000 progressives to run for office, electing 637 by focusing on down-ballot races. "We don't care about your resume," its website proclaims: All you need to be is a pro-abortion, pro-universal healthcare, pro-LGBTQ equality, pro-union, climate-committed leftist.

Valenzuela is one of the candidates Run for Something swept into office last November. Just three months later, she became the public face of the WESD/ACU dust-up, saying in her elected capacity that Biblical Christianity is a faith to be feared. You may recall that in the same month, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., publicly compared Christianity to fascism.

"You will be hated by all for My name's sake," Jesus said. Now, in America, it's becoming official. ■

Email *lvincent@wng.org*



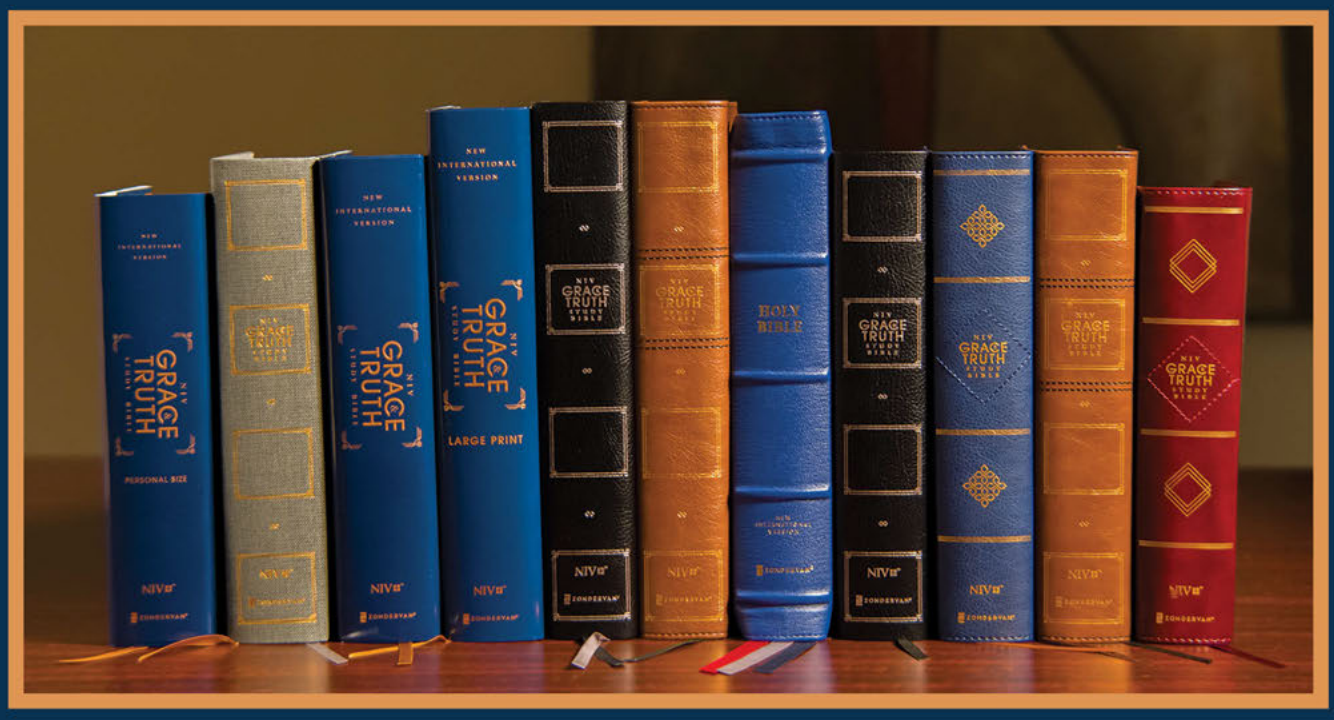
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TRENDING

Going on offense

Female athletes are fighting in different ways to keep men out of their sports

by RAY HACKE

WHEN THE WORLD SURF League announced a new rule allowing men who self-identify as women to compete as such if they suppress their testosterone levels for more than a year, Bethany Hamilton wasn't on board with it.

The champion Christian surfer has vowed not to participate in World Surf League events if the pro tour lets biological males compete in its women's division. Hamilton lent her star power to a movement that's gaining steam: Female athletes past and present, and their supporters, are fighting to keep men who claim to be women from displacing real women and girls in their own sports.

Hamilton is perhaps the most high-profile athlete to push back against the presence of what she called "male-bodied athletes" in women's sports. The 33-year-old Hawaiian's story of becoming a champion surfer after losing her left arm in a shark attack is well known thanks to her autobiography *Soul Surfer* and the 2011 movie of the same name.

In an Instagram video, Hamilton dialed up the irony to question the World Surf League's new hormone suppression rule: "How is this rule playing out in other sports like swimming, running, MMA [mixed martial arts]?"

Riley Gaines can answer that question firsthand: A 12-time All-American swimmer for the University of Kentucky, she saw the University of Pennsylvania's Lia (formerly Will) Thomas become the first man to win an NCAA women's swimming championship last spring. Under since-changed NCAA rules, Thomas had to sit out a year and suppress his testosterone to compete as a "female."

"[I] watched on the side of the pool as Thomas won a national title in the 500-yard freestyle, beating out the most accomplished female athletes in the country, including Olympic and American record-holders," Gaines said earlier this year, testifying before the Virginia Legislature in favor of a bill aimed at protecting women's sports. "Whereas just the year before, Thomas was ranking in the 400s in the men's category."

Hamilton isn't alone in refusing to compete against male athletes: Mid Vermont Christian School (MVCS) bowed out of its state's high school girls' basketball tournament in late February because the Eagles' first-round opponent, Long Trail School, had a male player on its roster.

"We withdrew from the tournament because we believe playing against an opponent with a biological male jeopardizes the fairness of the game and the safety of our →

players," Vicky Fogg, MVCS' Head of School, said in a statement. "Allowing biological males to participate in women's sports sets a bad precedent for the future of women's sports in general."

Long Trail went on to lose in the state quarterfinals, and MVCS paid a heavy price for its forfeit. In March, the Vermont Principals' Association, which governs high school athletics in the Green Mountain State, banned the Eagles' sports teams from participating in future state competitions.

But MVCS and others pushing back against male athletes—hormone-suppressed or not—in women's sports are pointing to science. A 2019 study published in the *Journal of Medical Ethics* showed suppressing testosterone levels does not cause male athletes to lose significant muscle mass or power—and what they do lose, they can easily regain. Whether leveraging the explosive arm and leg strength required to swim faster than a woman to catch a massive wave and stand up on a surfboard, or outmuscling female opponents for shots or rebounds in a basketball game, male athletes retain a significant advantage.

That advantage becomes even more pronounced when biologically male athletes need not suppress their testosterone. Few female athletes know this better than Selina Soule, a former high school sprinter who repeatedly watched helplessly from an adjoining lane as two male competitors, Terry Miller and Andraya Yearwood, rewrote Connecticut's track-and-field record books.

Miller and Yearwood have set 17 state records and collected 15 state titles between them. Whenever Soule and other girls competed against them, she knew they would be fighting for third place at best.

"It was very frustrating and demoralizing to have to go through almost every other week during the season," Soule said. "In the 100-meter dash, they'd be finished when all the other girls were at the 80-meter mark. It wasn't fair at all."



Former University of Kentucky swimmer Riley Gaines speaks during a rally outside the NCAA Convention in San Antonio.

"Allowing biological males to participate in women's sports sets a bad precedent for the future of women's sports in general."

For this reason, Soule and three other former high school sprinters—Chelsea Mitchell, Alanna Smith, and Ashley Nicoletti—have sued to have Miller's and Yearwood's names stricken from Connecticut's state record books.

Connecticut's federal district court dismissed Soule's case as moot given that she and her fellow former athletes have graduated. After initially upholding that ruling, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 2nd Circuit has elected to reconsider its decision. The court will hear oral arguments in June.

Soule's attorney, Christiana Kiefer of the Alliance Defending Freedom, is thrilled about that—especially since her clients might have advanced to prestigious meets and perhaps attracted college recruiters' attention but for the dominance of two biological males.

"The [original] three-judge panel got it wrong," Kiefer said. "My clients have lost opportunities. The panel was incorrect that the records don't matter." ■

DARREN ABATE/AP

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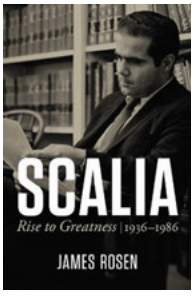
BOOKS

The making of a legal star

Scalia's greatness extended beyond his law career

by DANIEL R. SUHR

JUDGES DO NOT NORMALLY lend themselves to compelling biographies. Unlike men of action, such as warriors or presidents, their lives unfold primarily in the world of ideas, which can be awkward to chronicle and hard to keep moving. As Judge Richard Posner once observed, judicial biographies usually tell the story of the Supreme Court in a certain era, "unless the justice happens to be a person of exceptional qualities, which is rarely the case, or lived an exciting life, which is even more rare."



Scalia: Rise to Greatness, 1936-1986
JAMES ROSEN

In Antonin Scalia, James Rosen has found a subject worthy of a two-volume biography—a justice who lived a life defined by his exceptional qualities, not only of intellect but integrity, and whose public service, quick wit, and larger-than-life persona together make for actually interesting reading.

Scalia: Rise to Greatness, 1936-1986 (Regnery 2023) starts with the only child of a deeply Italian family growing up in Queens, playing stickball in the streets, and attending public school. Next came Xavier High School, a unique all-boys Catholic military academy. Scalia commuted on the subway in his cadet's uniform, rifle and backpack in tow. Here Rosen finds much of the future Scalia—a sharp-elbowed debater with a flair for the dramatic. Top honors at Georgetown and Harvard Law School followed.

Most of the book traces Scalia's professional career before becoming a justice, including his time in the Nixon and Ford administrations as a senior counselor and his professorships at Virginia and Chicago. The entire second half of the book occurs in the Reagan years, recounting his service on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit and the success of his nomination to the Supreme Court (which the U.S. Senate confirmed, 98-0). Here in particular we meet other judicial luminaries, especially Robert Bork and Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Volume 2 promises to pick up just after Scalia is sworn in, covering his transformational tenure on the high court.

Rightfully prominent in Rosen's account is Maureen Scalia, mother of nine, every bit as Irish as Nino was Italian, every bit as smart and Catholic and conservative—and opinionated. Rosen recounts that the day after Scalia joined a Supreme Court majority opinion upholding the right to burn the American flag, he came downstairs for breakfast to find his house bedecked in red, white, and blue and his wife humming "You're a Grand Old Flag."

Rosen, a former correspondent for Fox News, writes a sympathetic biogra-

CHARLES REX ARBOGAST/AP

"In Antonin Scalia, James Rosen has found a subject worthy of a two-volume biography."

phy. He does not begrudgingly acknowledge Scalia's intellectual influence and search for its root causes—he genuinely sees and appreciates his greatness. That separates his book from the two previous biographies of the justice, by Bruce Allen Murphy and Joan Biskupic, both of whom had ideological axes to grind against Scalia. Indeed, if anything, Rosen occasionally annoys by taking side-shots at these competing volumes rather than remaining focused on his subject. Rosen also sometimes repeats stories or attempts a creative writing style that reads awkwardly, detracting from the overall narrative.

As Rosen makes clear, Scalia's greatness extends far beyond his legal achievements. He was a man in full, with a deep faith, a robust family life, and a love for America. General readers are best served starting with *Scalia Speaks: Reflections on Law, Faith, and Life Well Lived* (Forum Books 2017), a collection of his speeches from across his life and interests. Scalia had his own unique cadence and style of speaking, and the assembled addresses are most fully enjoyed after watching a few YouTube videos of him so you hear his voice as you read his words. But for his fans in the Federalist Society and others who want a deeper dive, Rosen has given us the first half of a full, empathetic account of a life worthy of study. ■

BOOKS

Packed with wisdom

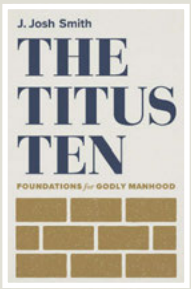
Finding important themes in Paul's letter to Titus

by RUSS PULLIAM

PAUL AND TIMOTHY usually dominate the headlines of any discipleship conversation. But Georgia Pastor Josh Smith adds Titus to the mix with *The Titus Ten: Foundations for Godly Manhood* (B&H Books 2022)—an excellent and welcome addition to modern discipleship books.

Titus was a key partner with Paul in the rapid spread of the early Church in the Roman Empire. Smith's book is not a commentary on Titus but a wisdom-packed review of 10 themes from the book.

Smith is senior pastor of Prince Avenue Baptist Church in Athens, Ga. Not all good preachers can make the transition from sermons to written text, but Smith has a nice way with words and keeps his sentences short.



The Titus Ten
J. JOSH SMITH

Some chapters stand out as potential stand-alone pamphlets. His identity chapter captures an important theme with helpful illustrations. "Those who do not know their true identity get into a cycle of comparing, coveting, and competing," he warns.

A section on self-control is simple yet profound as he identifies the trait as a primary theme of Paul's letter to Titus. "You must begin with the smaller areas of life. Begin with a disciplined time with the Lord every day," Smith writes. "Then gain control of your eating, commit to regular exercise, start coming home from work on time and commit to consistent and personal time with your children."

Go ahead and groan if you wish—he's just telling the truth. (As the subtitle suggests, the book is aimed at men, but women could learn from it, too.)

Smith also offers nuggets of wisdom to help readers think differently about common struggles. Are you too busy? "God has given me enough time to do everything He has called me to do."

His chapter on "investments" contains no stock tips. Smith gives something better—invest long term in people as Paul and Titus did. Example: "My children are my hobby." That's a brilliant investment.

In this, he connects back to the classic 1963 discipleship book *Master Plan of Evangelism* by the late Robert Coleman. Coleman wrote his short book to explain 2 Timothy 2:2 discipleship.

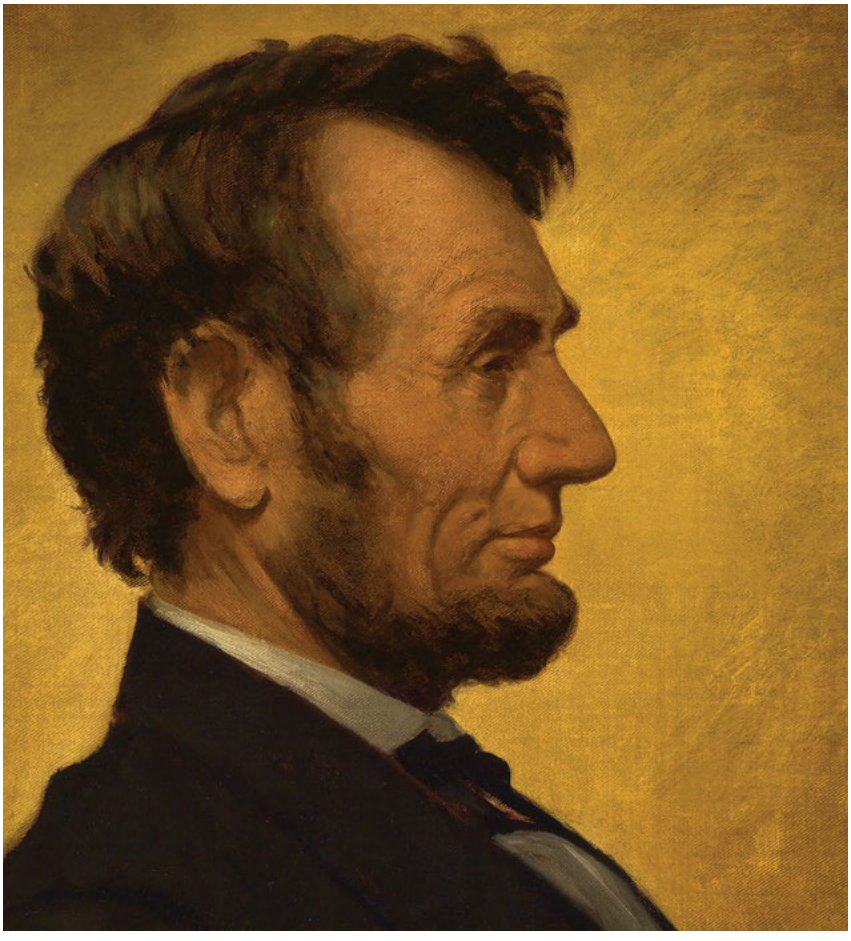
With *The Titus Ten,* Smith is ably following Coleman's worthy classic.

BOOKS

A son of Abraham?

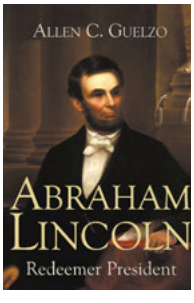
Author offers a religious and intellectual look at Lincoln

by EMILY WHITTEN



LAST NOVEMBER, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. released a new edition of the 1999 biography *Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President* by Allen C. Guelzo. Christians may want to mark the reprint for at least two reasons.

First, Guelzo's sensitivity to the religious aspects of Lincoln's life. The Princeton professor writes from a Christian perspective and as a leading scholar on the life of Jonathan Edwards. Thus, he's well-equipped to help readers answer questions like "Was Lincoln a Christian? And if not, how should we think about his religious and moral convictions?" Lincoln's presidency looms large here, but so do his private concerns, such as the early abuse he received from his Calvinist father and the death of his 3-year-old son.



Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President
ALLEN C. GUELZO

Second, as an "intellectual biography," Guelzo's book presents Lincoln as shaped by leading thinkers of his day like Henry Clay and John Stuart Mill. Lincoln then drew on those ideas to remake American culture and politics. Through his leadership during the Civil War, the "Redeemer President" helped redeem the nation from slavery and shape "a single people, unified rationally ... around certain propositions that transcended ethnicity, religious denominationalism, and gender." Those include the "proposition that all men are created equal" found in the Gettysburg Address.

Guelzo writes with poetry and erudition here. He isn't as gripping as a David McCullough, but he's more theologically astute, making *Abraham Lincoln* well worth readers' time and attention. Guelzo's preface details a number of revisions in this edition, including minor facts like the names of newspapers; he reckons his basic judgments have "stood up pretty firmly in the brisk and shifting breezes of interpretation."

Since 1999, debates over the role of slavery in America's history have only intensified. Readers will find this a robust and well-documented answer to recent historians who reduce American history to propaganda—be it left, right, religious, or secular.

Guelzo told WORLD that in composing this biography, he took his cue from the psalmist: "'As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.' And in many ways I take that and I apply it to Lincoln. I want to know what was in Lincoln's core." That core, he found, wasn't "redeemed" in the fullest Christian sense of the term, but it did enable Lincoln to redeem his country in important ways. ■

NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY/SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Picture book lessons

by KRISTIN CHAPMAN



Madani's Best Game
FRAN PINTADERA
(EERDMANS 2022)

Everyone knows Madani is the best soccer player in town. But unlike his teammates, Madani plays every game barefoot because he can't afford a pair of soccer cleats. He's carefully saving his money in a metal tin, though, and his friends imagine how much better he'll be able to run and kick once Madani finally has his own pair of cleats. The day finally comes when Madani goes to the store, but his friends are shocked when he returns still barefoot. Instead of shoes for himself, Madani has bought his mother a sewing machine that will allow her to work faster so she has time to come watch him play. A beautiful story of love and sacrifice. ***Ages 5-9***



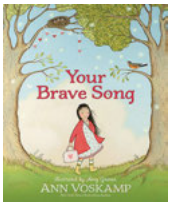
Sashiko
BARBARA CILETTI
(CREATIVE EDITIONS 2022)

This story introduces families to an ancient form of Japanese embroidery called sashiko. After cold weather sends fishermen home with empty boats, a girl watches her mother sew a new coat for her father—one that is thick, warm, and covered in intricate stitches. Although sashiko, which means "little stabs," first began as a way to reinforce clothing and make it warmer, it changed over the years into an exquisite form of textile art. Maria Cristina Pritelli's soft watercolor illustrations capture the beauty of the embroidery and the love sewn into each stitch. Note: Some of the text implies that the mother's stitches are magical and capable of protecting the father and ensuring a good catch. ***Ages 7-10***



Building an Orchestra of Hope
CARMEN OLIVER
(EERDMANS 2022)

When Favio Chavez first organized a youth orchestra in a poor Paraguayan town, he had more children than instruments. But he also had an ingenious friend, Colá, who combed through the landfill looking for anything he could use to fashion rudimentary instruments. Colá first constructed a violin from a glue canister, wooden spoon, and door keys. Then he made a drum from X-ray films, a viola from a paint can, and flutes from drain pipes. When there were enough instruments for all the children, Chavez taught them how to play: "The world sends us garbage. We send back music." A beautiful, true story showcasing how resourcefulness and resilience can positively shape a community and build hope. ***Ages 5-9***



Your Brave Song
ANN VOSKAMP
(TYNDALE KIDS 2023)

In her trademark poetic style, Voskamp reminds children they can conquer fear and worry when they root themselves in Christ. The story follows a young girl who takes a step of faith amid uncertainty and finds strength in the promise of her mother's song: "Jesus loves you, makes you strong. In Him you're brave and you belong." The book provides an opportunity for parents to discuss with their children what it means to find one's identity and acceptance in Christ, and how His perfect love for us casts out fear. Amy Grimes' beautiful illustrations frame Voskamp's words with whimsical nature scenes and include children from diverse heritages. ***Ages 4-8***



MOVIE

His Only Son

by COLLIN GARBARINO

▶ *Rated PG-13*
▶ *Theaters*

ONCE UPON A TIME in Hollywood, the Bible inspired filmmakers to create sweeping epics meant to awe, entertain, and inspire, but the genre fell from favor. With the Easter season upon us, upstart Angel Studios—the studio behind *The Chosen*—aims to bring the Bible back to the big screen with its first theatrical feature film, *His Only Son*.

The movie tells the story of Abraham, specifically the events surrounding God's command for Abraham to kill his son Isaac. It opens with Abraham waking in the middle of the night, receiving a clear instruction from God to sacrifice his son. Abraham keeps the details of God's message to himself, merely telling his wife Sarah that he and Isaac must travel to Mount Moriah to sacrifice to the Lord. It's a three-day journey to Moriah, and Sarah, reluctant to let her son go, convinces Abraham to take a couple of servants with him, too.

As the group walks through the dusty landscape—actually they shuffle oh so slowly through the dusty landscape—flashbacks to earlier events from Abraham's life interrupt the narrative—his original calling, the destruction of Sodom, the affair with Hagar. The journey is also interrupted a few times by extra-Biblical ruffians, meant to add a little drama and peril to the story.

His Only Son is writer-director David Helling's first feature film, and for a first film made with a modest budget, it isn't bad. Nicolas Mouawad and Sara Seyed play Abraham and Sarah, and they both give credible performances (though I can't say the same about all the supporting cast). Seyed's scene in which Sarah blames her husband for the affair with Hagar is a standout moment.

The movie contains some beautiful cinematography, and Helling deserves credit for getting the lighting right. Nothing makes a movie look cheap faster than bad lighting design. But the movie's small budget and the director's inexperience still make themselves known.

I liked Helling's decision to give Sarah Bedouin face tattoos, even though it seems unlikely the custom reflects a 4,000-year-old tradition. The costuming, on the other hand, was inconsistent, a mishmash of time periods and cultural traditions. The low budget is also obvious in the casting. *His Only Son* simply doesn't contain enough people for a feature film. At one point on the journey, Abraham and Isaac pass the city of Hebron, but they don't enter the strangely medieval-looking city. City sets and crowd scenes would have cost too much.

The movie also suffers from poor pacing. The extended scenes of our travelers stumbling along the road in silence make this 90-minute film drag. Bizarrely, the climax of the movie—I'm going to risk spoiling the 4,000-year-old story—in which Abraham binds Isaac and God intervenes with a substitute, is rushed. It's almost like Helling didn't know

ANGEL STUDIOS

Despite the movie's limitations, the journey with Abraham might be worth taking.

what to do once he got the patriarch to Mount Moriah.

Despite the movie's limitations, the journey with Abraham might be worth taking. Until I watched *His Only Son*, it never occurred to me to wonder how Abraham felt about the destruction of Sodom in light of his previously saving the inhabitants of that city at the Battle of Siddim. In this movie, mankind's sin tortures Abraham, and he's broken over his own failings. The movie notes the patriarch's adultery, lack of faith, and even his enslavement of others. Halfway through the film, the travelers have a theological discussion about the nature of sacrifice and atonement that sounds ripped from the pages of the New Testament.

Though this is a story from the Old Testament, Helling frames the narrative with the death of Jesus. It's an overtly Christian film tying the symbols of sacrifice to the true sacrifice accomplished on the cross. The movie reminds us no one, not even Abraham the possessor of the covenant, can earn God's favor. The Lord justifies His people through His own righteous substitute. ■



TRAE PATTON/PARAMOUNT+

TELEVISION

Star Trek: Picard

by MARTY VANDRIEL

▶ *Rated TV-MA*
▶ *Paramount+*

THERE'S SOMETHING enduring and endearing about Jean-Luc Picard, captain of the USS *Enterprise* in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, which ran from 1987 to 1994. Actor Patrick Stewart imbued Picard with charm, steadiness, and a healthy dose of humor, and the third season of *Picard* recaptures these same traits.

This third and final season opens with retired Adm. Picard in a melancholy, reflective mood. His ruminations are interrupted when long-lost friend Beverly Crusher (Gates McFadden) sends a cry for help across millions of miles of space. She warns Picard: "Trust no one!"

Picard finds his former first officer, Capt. Will Riker (Jonathan Frakes), and the two board the USS *Titan*. Heeding Beverly's plea for secrecy, they are not forthcoming about their mission, and high jinks ensue—some lighthearted, some dangerous, and none of it appreciated by Capt. Liam Shaw (Todd Stashwick). Soon we're introduced to a new threat to the Federation: The Changelings can mimic any species or life form.

In *Picard* the worldview remains scientifically materialistic. Capt. Riker laments to his friend Jean-Luc: "You and I have traveled to the far reaches of space, and yet there's nothing that proves to me that there is anything after [death]." But the heroes remain courageous and willing to sacrifice their lives for others.

Viewers can jump into this series without watching previous episodes of Star Trek, but fans will enjoy the callbacks to earlier characters and events. Most of the episodes have violence or coarse language (including a few regrettable blasphemies).

MOVIE

Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves

by COLLIN GARBARINO



▶ *Rated PG-13*
▶ *Theaters*

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS has been around for almost 50 years, but the tabletop role-playing game has never been more popular than it is today. It's not surprising that D&D's parent company Hasbro would want to capitalize on its recent surge in popularity with a feature film. What is a little surprising is that *Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves* isn't just a corporate cash grab. It's actually a really good movie.

Filmmakers Jonathan Goldstein and John Francis Daley have created a fantastic romp likely to appeal to both die-hard fans and casual moviegoers.

As in a typical game of D&D, the movie features a party of adventurers with different backgrounds who work together to complete a quest. Edgin the bard (Chris Pine) and his friend Holga the barbarian (Michelle Rodriguez) enlist a half-elven wizard of middling ability (Justice Smith) and a shape-shifting druid (Sophia Lillis) to help them rescue Edgin's daughter from the villainous Forge (Hugh Grant). Along the way, they encounter both dungeons and dragons, and in true D&D style, they must complete a side quest or two.

Honor Among Thieves is set in D&D's Forgotten Realms, a fantasy world partially inspired by J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. Similar to Tolkien's Middle Earth, humans, elves, halflings, and orcs inhabit the D&D world, but it also has myriad other intelligent races. Tolkien's story took place in a low-magic fantasy world, but wizards and magical items are commonplace in the Forgotten Realms.

Hundreds of pulp fantasy novels have been set in the Forgotten Realms, but Goldstein and Daley work from an original story, deftly dropping the audience into what feels like the halfway point of a much longer adventure taking place in a fully realized world. Despite beginning in the middle of things, we immediately understand this bizarre, yet relatable, land of magic and mayhem.

The action scenes showcase solid choreography with special effects that support the story rather than distract from it. Too often the high-fantasy genre indulges in self-importance striving for epic status. The fate of the universe always hangs in the balance in an eternal struggle between the forces of good and evil. The stakes in *Honor Among Thieves* are high, but they're not that high.

This film doesn't aim for epic status. At its core, it's a heist movie, albeit a magical heist—more akin to *Ocean's Eleven* than *Lord of the Rings*. Edgin must assemble a team, make a plan, and break into a fortress. The heist's execution is both inventive and delightful.

Goldstein and Daley also made the wise choice of abandoning the fantasy genre's serious tendencies and doubling down on the humor. Chris Pine shows off his comic chops, and Michelle Rodriguez plays an excellent straight man. The film might not be an epic, but it's epically funny. ■

AIDAN MONAGHAN/PARAMOUNT PICTURES

BOX OFFICE TOP 10

For the weekend of March 17-19, according to Box Office Mojo

1. ***Shazam! Fury of the Gods***
   PG-13 • S1 / V6 / L4†
2. ***Scream VI***
   R • S3 / V8 / L10
3. ***Creed III****
   PG-13 • S3 / V5 / L5
4. ***65***
   PG-13 • S0 / V6 / L3
5. ***Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania****
   PG-13 • S1 / V5 / L4
6. ***Cocaine Bear***
   R • S1 / V8 / L10
7. ***Jesus Revolution****
   PG-13 • S2 / V3 / L2
8. ***Champions***
   PG-13 • S4 / V3 / L5
9. ***Avatar: The Way of Water****
   PG-13 • S4 / V6 / L5
10. ***Puss in Boots: The Last Wish****
    PG • S1 / V3 / L3

**Reviewed by WORLD*

†Ratings from kids-in-mind.com, with quantity of sexual (S), violent (V), and foul-language (L) content on a 0-10 scale, with 10 high

LORD OF THE RINGS AND HOBBIT FILMS BY GROSS EARNINGS

→ ***The Return of the King*** / 2003
→ ***The Two Towers*** / 2002
→ ***The Fellowship of the Ring*** / 2001
→ ***An Unexpected Journey*** / 2012
→ ***The Desolation of Smaug*** / 2013
→ ***The Battle of the Five Armies*** / 2014

SOURCE: BOX OFFICE MOJO



20TH CENTURY STUDIOS

MOVIE

Boston Strangler

by COLLIN GARBARINO

▶ *Rated R*
▶ *Hulu*

SIXTY YEARS AGO, the strangling of 13 women in Boston shocked the country, but national scrutiny didn't help solve the mystery. *Boston Strangler* takes a fresh look at these crimes through the eyes of two reporters.

The film follows the two female journalists, Loretta McLaughlin (Keira Knightley) and Jean Cole (Carrie Coon). Loretta's the first to recognize the pattern in the murders, breaking the story in the *Boston Record American*. Her story forces the police to admit a serial killer might be loose in Boston. Veteran reporter Jean joins Loretta in her quest to uncover the truth. Their stories on the Boston Strangler shape public perception, and they become part of the story.

All but one of the Boston Strangler cases are still unsolved, allowing the film to craft a narrative of "what really happened." And while there's some speculation and hedging in the movie, its overall explanation seems plausible—certainly more so than 1968's *The Boston Strangler* starring Tony Curtis.

Boston Strangler contains disturbing scenes and some bad language, but it depicts sexual assault and murder with a fair amount of restraint. The focus remains on the reporters' investigation, and *Boston Strangler* reminds the viewer how hard journalists worked before the digital age. Loretta and Jean put in long hours, writing on manual typewriters, tracking down sources on foot, and sifting through boxes of paper by hand.

Loretta and Jean uncover ineptitude in Boston's police department and fight against male editors to get the story published. The film has a feminist subtext in which women must protect other women, but there's a certain ring of truth to it. In this fallen world, men too often fail to protect as they should.



MUSIC

The boss gives it his all

Bruce Springsteen's impressive 2023 tour

by ARSENIO ORTEZA

BY THE TIME that you read these words, Bruce Springsteen will be two-thirds of the way through the first leg of his 88-date 2023 world tour.

With a set list ranging from 26 to 28 songs and a running time of 2½ hours, the shows qualify as herculean even by the Boss' legendary road-warrior standards. That Springsteen is 73 and the members of his E Street Band a median age of 72—and that neither he nor they sound any worse for wear—puts what they're doing in a class by itself.

True, they're accompanied by a horn section, background singers doubling on percussion, and Jake Clemons (the nephew of Springsteen's late sidekick Clarence Clemons) on sax. But it's Steve van Zandt, Nils Lofgren, Roy Bittan, Garry Tallent, Patti Scialfa, and Max Weinberg who provide the muscle.

You don't have to attend the performances to hear what's going on. For $14.99, you can buy high-quality MP3s of every show from the music-streaming site nugs.net. And whether you grab one or several (to experience some of the dozen or so numbers that have been played only once or twice), prepare to be impressed.

That Springsteen and band are giving it their all makes sense: The stakes for them have never been higher. First, there's the need to justify the average ticket price ($262). Second, given the performers' septuagenarian status, there's a good possibility that this tour will be their last. So why *not* throw in hearty renditions of such 50-year-old nuggets as "The E Street Shuffle" and "Kitty's Back"? To leave audiences wanting more when there might not be more would be cruel.

So would depriving them of a steady stream of classics. Aside from a few cuts from *Letter to You* (2020) and last year's collection of soul covers *Only the Strong Survive*, the hits just keep on comin'. So what if "Brilliant Disguise" (the 29th-most-performed song in Springsteen history), "Hungry Heart" (the 10th), and "Born in the U.S.A." (the seventh) have been conspicuous by their absence? The tour is young.

Also, Springsteen's occasionally overbearing left-wing politics have yet to rear their head. While Pink has told pro-lifers never to listen to her music again, Springsteen has deigned to perform—twice—in the land of Ron DeSantis (albeit in cities located in counties that went for Charlie Crist). Meanwhile, his March 25 date at the Greensboro Coliseum makes his boycott of North Carolina over its short-lived 2016 "bathroom bill" seem like distant history.

A handful of band members have missed a gig or two after testing positive for COVID, but even the unvaccinated, who just two years ago were excluded from Springsteen's one-man Broadway show, may attend. And judging from the unmuffled cheering and audience participation captured by nugs.net, fans are forgoing masks.

What better way to celebrate a pure product of the land of the free and the home of the brave? ■

ROB GRABOWSKI/INVISION/AP

MUSIC

New and noteworthy

by ARSENIO ORTEZA



Parables ANDREW AKINS

The title cues you in to the gospel-rooted lessons that arise from the songs. But whether he's Colorado dreamin' on such a winter's day or crying the Rio Grande, Andrew Akins isn't telling stories. He's baring his soul—to Americana melodies and instrumentation appropriate to such an endeavor. He tries "to be a good man," even praying to stay "poor and humble" (because God causes the proud to stumble) and for God to "wrestle [him] down" Jacob-style. Still, he knows that he could end up doomed. Listeners familiar with Jeremiah 17:9 and Matthew 7:21-23 will understand.



The Cannonballers COLONY HOUSE

Want to feel old? Will and Caleb Chapman are now about the same age as their father, Steven Curtis Chapman, when he recorded *The Great Adventure*. Want to feel young? Press play on "Landlocked Surf Rock" (the video's narrator says it's about "echoes of Eden") and "Cannonballers" (Plastic Bertrand's "Ça plane pour moi" on a roller coaster that might be a ghost train). The explosive energy of both will have you on your feet and dancing or air-banding in seconds. The other songs find the band realizing that life's not all fun and games—sounding, in other words, like guys in their 30s.



Your Mother Should Know: Brad Mehldau Plays the Beatles BRAD MEHLDAU

Mehldau has recorded Beatles songs before, six to be specific, five of those McCartney's. This solo live-in-Paris recording adds 10: five more McCartneys, two Lennon-McCartneys, two Lennons, and a Harrison. (Sorry, Ringo fans.) Except for the gently barrelhousing "I Saw Her Standing There," the interpretations have the feel of a daydream. The Bowie composition sneaked in at the end does not spoil the mood.



The Vivian Line RON SEXSMITH

That Sexsmith's 12 latest gems run to just over 33 minutes doesn't mean that he's scrimping. It means that he doesn't belabor a point, whether verbal, melodic, or—in the case of the baroque-pop touches that his producer convinced him to apply—musical. The only sign of encroaching imperfection is that some songs are more gemlike than others: to wit, "A Place Called Love" (all are welcome), "What I Had in Mind" (take that, compulsory schooling), "Flower Boxes" (every day is Mother's Day), and "Outdated and Antiquated" (about what makes Sexsmith's songcraft increasingly valuable as time marches on).



WALTER MCBRIDE/GETTY IMAGES

ENCORE

When **Chuck Jackson** died two days after Valentine's Day at the age of 85, more than 60 years had passed since the songs "Any Day Now" and "I Don't Want To Cry" made him a pop chart two-hit wonder. Given his rich, burly voice (which Tom Jones must have studied) and the precise sonic definition of his many recordings for Wand (1961-1967) and Motown (1968-1971), his failure to connect more often with the singles-buying public remains a mystery.

For those interested in solving it, the compilations *Good Things*, *Big New York Soul*, and *The Motown Anthology* contain the relevant evidence. One clue that emerges is the inhibiting effects of typecasting. In almost every song, Jackson is either pursuing romance or recovering from a romance gone bad. More significantly, Brook Benton and B.B. King narrowly beat him to "Rainy Night in Georgia" and "The Thrill Is Gone" respectively. Had Jackson's versions reached DJs first, the sky would've been the limit. —A.O.



VOICES **JANIE B. CHEANEY**

The New College experiment

University capture, and recapture

IN THE HEADY DAYS OF JUNE 1962, the Students for a Democratic Society met for its first convention outside Port Huron, Mich. The occasion produced a founding document, the Port Huron Statement, drafted by student activist Tom Hayden.

The statement clanged with disillusion. "When we were kids the United States was the wealthiest and strongest country in the world," but these wised-up kids now recognized the emptiness, the isolation, the corporate soullessness, the Jim-Crow injustice, and the greed of the military-industrial complex in this supposed "golden age." Their fellow Americans plowed along in their apathetic rut, while these visionary youth stared into "the decline of an era." Apocalyptic urgency spurred them to ask such questions as, "If we wanted to change society, how would we do it?" Answer: the university.

As it appeared to them, institutions of higher learning were bastions of conformity, where apathetic students pursued utilitarian goals under complacent professors. But the potential was enormous. What other institution possessed the social influence, the openness, the adaptability, and the resources, all in one place? What better incubator for the "new left" (as they called themselves) to plant its ideas and distribute them throughout the nation?

The Port Huron Statement provided the rationale for the so-called long march that began in universities and eventually transformed K-12 education. Despite its eloquent declarations of love for mankind and sympathy for their isolation, the statement makes no mention whatsoever of family, neighborhood, or church. All solutions were political. All remedies would come from the state, guided by enlightened university grads.

We know now how that worked out. Critics across the political spectrum have been increasingly alarmed about the hard-left academic tilt that stifles free thought and expression. Correcting the tilt through special endowments has had little effect. Exceptions like Hillsdale and Grove City College are few. Brave start-ups like the University of Austin are encouraging but daunting. From Florida comes a new approach: the sudden takeover of an established institution.

New College of Florida began as a small, private, unconventional institution that became part of the university system in the 1970s when the state assumed its debts. It's still small and unconventional, but earlier this year Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis replaced six members of its board of trustees with conservative academics and activists—including Christopher Rufo, who has made a name for himself exposing woke trends in corporate boardrooms and university campuses. The trustees replaced the college president with a former (Republican) speaker of the Florida House and abolished the college's diversity, equity, and inclusion office. Not a takeover, insists board member Matthew Spalding of Hillsdale, but a renewal.

Bold, decisive, brazen, chilling, chaotic—the adjectives rolled in. Is New College standing athwart the long leftward march shouting "Stop!" or is it a fascist fist slamming down on free thought?

More than anything, it's an experiment. Specifically, a political experiment, and that's where it gets dicey. Proponents make a strong case that New College is a public institution that should serve the public, not the boutique fads of intellectual elites. Also, that universities, in general, have become indoctrination centers rather than havens for free thought and discussion. But even right-leaning organizations like the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression caution that any makeover "must be careful not to trade one orthodoxy for another."

Rufo denies the orthodoxy charge, saying he only wants New College to be open to all views. Without some orthodoxy, though, any institution will drift, almost always in a leftward direction. A clear, consistent vision that avoids the messianic language and political focus of Port Huron would signal a promising start. But only a start. Real renewal is spiritual—not the goal of politics, but the inspiration. ■

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GOD'S WORLD NEWS AND WORLD RADIO PRESENT

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PANDEMIC PR

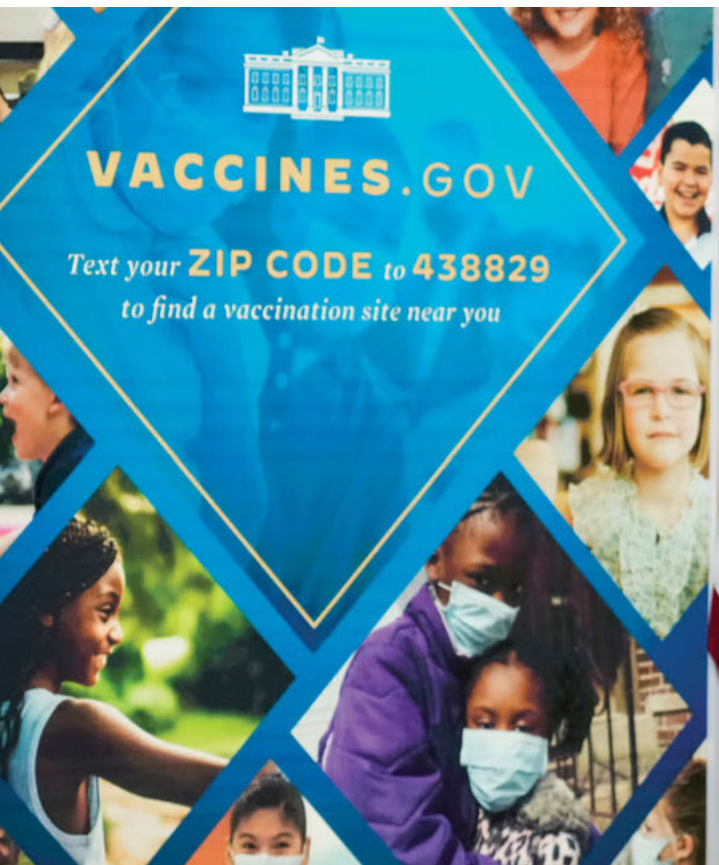
On the third anniversary of lockdowns, experts reassess





ESCRIPTIONS

the sharp divide over COVID vaccines / *by* Emma Freire





GREGORY POLAND STILL CARRIES A POSTCARD HE RECEIVED IN 2020 FROM A 9-YEAR-OLD GIRL. THE LARGE HANDWRITING IN PURPLE MARKER READS, "HI THERE DID YOU FIND A VACSEN YET DO YOU THINK COVED WILL BE OVER SONNE."

Poland holds it up during our Zoom interview, covering the girl's name to protect her privacy.

"This little girl took it upon herself to write to me," said Poland, a professor of medicine and infectious disease at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn. "She's had a liver transplant and she's scared." Poland and his wife met the girl and her family during the COVID-19 lockdown. He says they got so close to the family they became like her unofficial grandparents. Eventually the girl did get COVID, and he helped her through it. Today, she's fully recovered.

"This is why I do what I do," Poland said, tears welling in his eyes.

Poland is the founder and director of the Mayo Vaccine Research Group and the editor-in-chief of the journal *Vaccine*. He gives consultative advice to nearly every Western vaccine manufacturer, including Pfizer and Moderna, and is a vaccine adviser to the Biden White House.

Those positions cross-pollinate well, but Poland also has a surprising line on his résumé. He graduated from Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and serves as assistant pastor of a Presbyterian church in Florida, where he lives. "It's only a modern concept that there's any sort of divide between ministry and medicine," he told me. "I've been a believer as long as I've been a physician, which is over 40 years, and regularly pray with my patients."

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic swept into America like a flash flood into a canyon. In those early days, the level of fear and isolation was nearly unbearable for many. Millions of Americans looked forward to the release of vaccines as to the coming of a savior—their only protection against death or severe sickness.

Hospitals braced for impact. Staffers at the Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore set up a special COVID in-patient ward to prepare for an influx of patients. Stuart Ray, a professor of medicine in the division of infectious diseases, volunteered to be the attending physician on the first shift.

"I thought, 'This is not that different from what we had at the height of AIDS,'" Ray said. Plus, younger medical staff members were nervous, "so I just suited up. I've been at Hopkins for 32 years and wearing PPE is part of the job as an infectious-disease doctor," he said, referring to the acronym for personal protective equipment. Ray stands out in a crowd, not only because he's 6'5" with blond hair and blue eyes, but because he still wears a mask. He credits masking for the fact that he's never been infected with COVID.

This month marks three years since those terrifying early days of the pandemic, and unlike Ray, most Americans have thrown their masks in the trash. But many questions linger, particularly about the efficacy and risks of the COVID-19 vaccines. Eighteen months ago, such questions prompted condescension from public health officials and medical community leaders. Now, though, doctors and researchers have begun openly debating what went wrong during the pandemic response—and trying to tally the fallout.

But Gregory Poland isn't debating. He says plainly that America now needs a COVID "truth commission": "We had people sworn to protect the public health who politicized this and said something publicly different than what they did privately. And it cost people's lives."

IN LATE 2020, the FDA issued emergency use authorizations (EUA) for two COVID-19 vaccines made by Pfizer and Moderna. Both relied on a newer technology that uses mRNA—or messenger RNA—created in a lab. A single-stranded molecule of ribonucleic acid, mRNA works in the COVID vaccines by teaching healthy cells how to make a

PREVIOUS SPREAD (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): JIM WEST/ALAMY; DAVID GOLDMAN/AP; DREW ANGERER/GETTY IMAGES; NOAH BERGER/AP



A healthcare worker comforts a patient in the COVID-19 ward at United Memorial Medical Center in Houston in 2020.

full or partial protein that triggers an immune response.

In Februrary 2021, the FDA issued an EUA for a vaccine produced by Johnson & Johnson (J&J). The J&J vaccine worked using a modified version of a vector virus—not the COVID-19 virus—to trigger the immune response. Some Americans preferred that more traditional technology. However, in May 2022, the FDA restricted use of the J&J vaccine due to a risk of blood clots.

MRNA technology had not been used in the vaccines Americans normally get, but it didn't come out of nowhere, says John Moore, an immunologist at Weill Cornell Medical College in New York City. "MRNA vaccines were under development for the best part of a decade." When President Donald Trump announced Operation Warp Speed in May 2020 to accelerate vaccine development and production, the mRNA options won out.

"It was a logistics issue because of the urgent need to get as many people vaccinated as possible," Moore said. "It was whatever could be made as quickly as possible in bulk because you're making billions of doses in the end. You don't do that by snapping your fingers."

Vaccines usually require five to 10 years or even longer to reach patients. Compared with that, COVID-19 shots did arrive in a finger-snap. Johns Hopkins' Stuart Ray called the vaccines "almost miraculous." Moore called them a "game changer."

"I think a lot of the fear went out of our society; at least people who chose to be vaccinated could get back on with their lives," Moore said.

Public health officials trumpeted the vaccines' arrival with a massive public relations campaign, but many

MARK FELIX/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Americans' attitude was, "Not so fast." For months, health officials had seemingly contradicted themselves about important aspects of the pandemic response, eroding public trust.

Poland believes that mistrust, and not conspiracy theories or scientific ignorance, drove vaccine resistance. He notes that the country of Denmark had one of the highest rates of vaccine uptake. "When [researchers] ask people why they got vaccinated, they say: 'It's because our government leaders in public health told us to, so we did it.' They trust their government."

Epidemiologist Jay Bhattacharya challenged the public health response from the beginning. A professor of medicine at Stanford University and a committed Christian, Bhattacharya found the official approach alarming.

"Public health panicked and misread the evidence," he said. "Instead of sticking to normal standards for very high-quality evidence for making decisions, they decided because this was such a crisis, even low-quality evidence would suffice to make very broad decisions that damaged the lives and livelihoods of the poor, the vulnerable working class, and children."

Bhattacharya chooses his words carefully, often qualifying his statements. He looks every inch the professor with his salt-and-pepper hair, glasses, and sweater. But his mild demeanor belies the boldness it took to defy the apparent consensus of public health officials not only in America but in most of the world.

In October 2020, Bhattacharya joined with epidemiologists from Harvard and Oxford to write an open letter, the Great Barrington Declaration. The document called for "focused protection" of those at risk for COVID and letting everyone else go about their lives. "There's nothing really new in it," Bhattacharya told me. "It's basically the old pandemic plan that worked for a century for respiratory virus pandemics. You protect vulnerable people and develop therapeutics and vaccines as quickly as you can. And then for the rest of the world, you don't disrupt society because it hurts people more than it helps them."



Thousands of people march in Washington on Jan. 23, 2022, for the Defeat the Mandate protest against COVID-19 vaccine mandates.

Preeminent public health officials, such as famed geneticist Francis Collins, met the Great Barrington Declaration with fierce criticism, claiming the approach it advocated would cause mass fatalities. Collins, who is also a Christian and once led the Human Genome Project, by 2020 headed the National Institutes of Health. He fired off an email to Anthony Fauci, then director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. Collins called for a "quick and devastating published takedown" of the Great Barrington Declaration. In the same email, which came to light through a Freedom of Information Act request, Collins called Bhattacharya and his co-authors "three fringe epidemiologists."

MARK PETERSON/REDUX

"You protect vulnerable people and develop therapeutics and vaccines as quickly as you can. And then for the rest of the world, you don't disrupt society because it hurts people more than it helps them."

Bhattacharya's faith helped him cope with those attacks. "For me, my identity is in Christ," he said. He now carries around business cards a friend made for him that say "Fringe Epidemiologist."

Still, the email's implications were no joke. "Tony Fauci and Francis Collins sit on top of almost $45 billion of money that funds the work of every biomedical scientist of note in the United States," Bhattacharya said. "You can't get tenure at a top medical school unless you have an NIH grant. So when they say 'fringe epidemiologists,' it's an implied threat: If you cross us, it's not just that you won't be able to get funding for your research. It also determines social status within science."

Bhattacharya believes that's why there appeared to be broad medical consensus about COVID policies when many medical professionals did not in fact agree. Today, more of those professionals feel free to speak their minds. The central idea of the Great Barrington Declaration, that mass shutdowns caused more harm than they averted, is becoming mainstream opinion.

IN 2021, COLLEGIAL EFFORTS to raise vaccine uptake turned into mandates. That September, President Joe Biden issued executive orders requiring vaccination for federal government employees and companies with 100 or more employees. The Supreme Court eventually struck down the mandate for private employers, but many companies imposed their own. A survey in late 2022 found that over one-third of businesses still required employees to be vaccinated.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 81 percent of eligible Americans got at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. Meanwhile, Christians and other religious objectors across many occupations scrambled to file exemptions. Many objected to vaccines based on the use of aborted fetal tissue cells in testing or production.

Brandon Scroggins pastors Reformation Baptist Church in Wetumpka, Ala. He wrote eight to 10 exemptions for people faced with getting fired if they didn't get the shot. "I thought it's the least we could do to help our people who stand to lose everything," he said.

That was especially true for members of the military. All service branches required COVID-19 vaccination. Scroggins wrote an exemption for a church member who was approaching retirement after 19½ years in the Air Force. The exemption review dragged on long enough that he reached 20 years. He was able to retire unvaccinated with his full pension. His case was unusual, though. About 8,400 service members were discharged for refusing the vaccine.

Some doctors spoke out against universal vaccination. Martin Kulldorff, professor of medicine at Harvard University (on leave) and co-author of the Great Barrington Declaration, tweeted in March 2021, "Thinking that everyone must be vaccinated is as scientifically flawed as thinking that nobody should. COVID vaccines are important for older high-risk people, and their care-takers. Those with prior natural infection do not need it. Nor children."

However, Twitter censored Kulldorff's opinion and similar ones by other doctors, a fact revealed by the "Twitter files," a trove of documents Elon Musk released after he purchased the company. Two vaccine reviewers resigned from their positions at the Food and Drug Administration, openly declaring their disagreement with the agency's recommendation that everyone get boosted.

Bhattacharya notes that vaccine trials tested only whether the shots prevented symptomatic infection for three months. Not a very useful benchmark, he said: "What you want to know is, does this vaccine prevent disease transmission?"

But those shortcomings did not stop people from drawing excessively optimistic conclusions—that, for example, the vaccine would make the disease go away. "That was never possible," Bhattacharya said.

Along with mandates, vilification and even demonization of unvaccinated Americans became widespread. President Biden got in on the act in December 2021. "We are looking at a winter of severe illness and death for the unvaccinated—for themselves, their families, and the hospitals they'll soon overwhelm," he said.

Though hospitalizations and deaths among older Americans spiked that January, no wave of mass deaths materialized. But the share of deaths among those who received a vaccine did climb throughout 2022, according to a Kaiser Family Foundaton analysis. Amid these statistics, official hyperbole about vaccine efficacy seemed to harden the resolve of Americans already hesitant about getting the shot. Bhattacharya believes it's unlikely the vaccines would have been as contentious as they were—and still are—had people not felt government pressure to take them.

THE GOVERNMENT'S controversial vaccine messaging is largely over, but investigations into the harm caused by the vaccines themselves is only now ramping up. A study by the Commonwealth Fund in December found the vaccines had prevented over 18 million hospitalizations and 3 million deaths. The study used a computer model of disease transmission to come up with its estimates. But it's impossible to put a precise number on something that didn't happen. And despite the vaccines, the CDC says over 1 million Americans have died of COVID.

A January 2023 Rasmussen poll found nearly half of Americans think COVID-19 vaccines are to blame for many unexplained deaths, and more than a quarter think they know someone who might have been a victim.

Sandy Regler, 61, believes she suffered an adverse reaction. On a cold Baltimore morning in January 2022, she woke up with a strange throbbing in her head. "It was this persistent headache, 24 hours a day," she said. Regler is a retired police officer who had always enjoyed good health and had no history of headaches. She first went to her doctor, then began milling through an endless cycle of tests and appointments with specialists.

She also went to her dentist to see if the headaches might stem from some kind of jaw issue. The dentist asked a question that startled her: "How soon after your booster did the headache start?" Regler replied that she had gotten the first series of vaccines in April 2021 followed by a booster in December. The headache, she said, started several weeks later. Even now when she asks doctors about a connection with the vaccine, they get "very, very uncomfortable," she says. At this point, Regler manages the pain with prescription medications but still has many questions.

She's not alone. During a congressional hearing in February, Rep. Nancy Mace, R-S.C., said she suddenly developed chronic asthma after her second shot. "I have tremors in my left hand, and I have the occasional heart pain no doctor can explain."

Much of the speculation about adverse reactions centers on the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS), a database co-managed by the CDC and FDA. Private individuals and medical professionals can use VAERS to report post-vaccination health events.

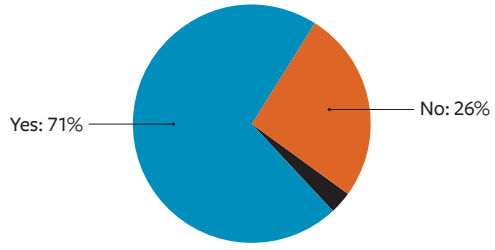
Stuart Ray warns VAERS alone cannot be used to draw conclusions. "VAERS only asks the question: Have you had any health event, and did you receive the vaccine?" To date, over 19,000 deaths after COVID-19 vaccination have been reported to VAERS, but the CDC has only confirmed nine as causally linked to the vaccines. All events require further study to evaluate a causal relationship.

You would be hard-pressed to find a person more pro-vaccine than the Mayo Clinic's Gregory Poland, but he also acknowledges suffering an adverse reaction. "After my second dose of the mRNA vaccine, I developed tinnitus,

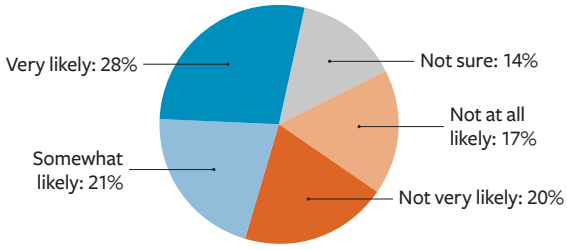
Vaccine concerns

A January Rasmussen poll asked 1,000 Americans ...

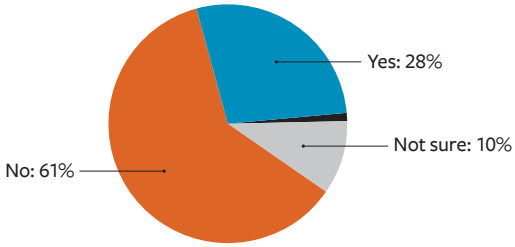
HAVE YOU RECEIVED A COVID-19 VACCINATION?



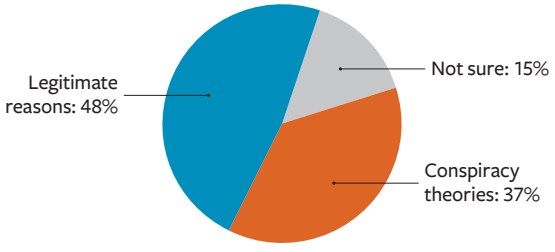
HOW LIKELY IS IT THAT SIDE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 VACCINES HAVE CAUSED A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF UNEXPLAINED DEATHS?



DO YOU PERSONALLY KNOW ANYONE WHOSE DEATH YOU THINK MAY HAVE BEEN CAUSED BY SIDE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 VACCINES?



WHICH IS CLOSER TO YOUR BELIEF, THAT THERE ARE LEGITIMATE REASONS TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT THE SAFETY OF COVID-19 VACCINES, OR THAT PEOPLE WHO WORRY ABOUT VACCINE SAFETY ARE SPREADING CONSPIRACY THEORIES?



The margin of sampling error is +/- 3 percentage points with a 95% level of confidence.



The manager of a New York diner waits for customers behind a sign informing patrons that they must present proof of vaccination to be seated in 2021.

ANTHONY BEHAR/SIPA USA VIA AP

which is a persistent ringing in the ears, and I decided to go ahead and get my third dose and it got dramatically worse," he said. "Once I was sitting in a hot tub by myself at night, looking up at the stars and tears came to my eyes, realizing I will never hear quiet or silence again."

Poland still strongly believes the benefits of COVID-19 vaccines outweigh the risks. He recently encouraged vaccination for his daughter-in-law, who is pregnant, and also for his 18-month-old grandson. He speaks openly about his tinnitus in hopes of provoking honest discussion about the vaccine and to encourage doctors not to dismiss patients who complain of adverse reactions. He recently addressed an online gathering of vaccine-injured people: "I realize as I'm looking at the sea of faces on the screen, people are crying. And so I stopped to inquire about this. The bottom line was, they told me, 'Nobody has taken us seriously.'"

COVID-19 vaccines have proven highly lucrative. Pfizer brought in around $36 billion from global sales of its vaccine in 2021, making it one of the most profitable pharmaceutical products in history. This led some to charge that vaccine mandates represented a form of corporate welfare. COVID vaccine makers are exempted from legal liability under the Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness Act of 2005. Still, victims of vaccine injuries can seek compensation under a federal program called the Countermeasures Injury Compensation Program. It pays a maximum of $50,000 per year for lost wages and covers medical bills. The maximum payout for a death is $370,376. The program has received 11,252 claims related to COVID-19 vaccines and treatments. So far, it has awarded compensation for only 21 claims.

The FDA and CDC currently acknowledge some adverse events, including myocarditis (an inflammation of the heart muscle), blood clots, disruptions to women's menstrual cycles, and Guillain-Barré syndrome, a neurological disorder. Poland is working to get tinnitus added to the list. "When I'm in rooms with them, I pound my fist on the table," he said, recalling meetings with public health officials. "I'm pushing CDC, who doesn't want to recognize tinnitus as a side effect, even though other countries have."

Bhattacharya believes the focus on vaccine injuries is, at least partly, a manifestation of resentment. "The idea the vaccine created harm is very salient if you feel forced to take it, as opposed to something you chose to take because it was right for you from a medical point of view."

VACCINE UPTAKE HAS WANED drastically over time. According to the CDC, only 16 percent of the eligible population has received the latest boosters. Poland says public health officials have done a poor job of communicating their benefits. They are presented as a matter of life or death, he said, when they should be framed in nuanced terms regarding the protection they offer against serious infection and its side effects. "You can't capture that in a public health recommendation," he said. "And so they end up saying very black-and-white things. I always kind of grit my teeth."

Stuart Ray hopes doctors will eventually be able to make booster recommendations based on a patient's risk profile, as determined by tests and medical history. Poland is tracking promising research on redeveloping boosters as a nasal spray, transcutaneous patch, or oral tablet.

In his role as a White House vaccine adviser, Poland fields questions about the best way to communicate with the public. He always repeats the same advice: "radical, transparent honesty."

Public health officials should acknowledge the risks of the vaccines but weigh those against the greater risks posed by the virus, he said. But they should also admit there are still many unknowns. After that, Poland said, officials should strive to answer every last question anybody asks.

"I think when you approach people that way, you build trust with them," he said. "It takes a long time to build trust. It takes one minute for the government to destroy trust." ■

STEP BY STEP

A U.S. limb clinic helps Ukrainians recover from the wounds of war

by SHARON DIERBERGER





Dr. Jacob Gradinar helps Serhii Voronin prepare his legs for prosthetics; rescue workers clear rubble after the collapse of buildings destroyed by the Russian army in Borodyanka, Ukraine.

GRADINAR: PHOTO BY SHARON DIERBERGER; BORODYANKA: MAXYM MARUSENKO/NURPHOTO/AP

The explosion came out of nowhere. One minute, 26-year-old Serhii Voronin was bumping across a Ukrainian farm field in the passenger seat of an off-road army vehicle, talking with his commander. The next, he was gazing down at bloody stumps where his legs used to be. The vehicle had rolled directly over a land mine meant for a tank, strategically placed by Russian forces in a war-ravaged district of Kharkiv in northeastern Ukraine.

"I thought about my family, because I was between life and death with no guarantee I would survive," he told me through an interpreter. "I knew I had lost a lot of blood."

Medics, scrambling from an unscathed vehicle behind Voronin's pulled him from the mangled truck, strapped him to a stretcher and rushed him to the hospital. He lost consciousness before heading into surgery.

Voronin can't forget the terrible images from that rainy September afternoon. But today, on a sub-zero Minnesota winter morning, more than 5,000 miles from the front lines, he smiles as he surveys the scene around him from his wheelchair.

It's about as far from the battlefield as he could get: clean and calm, no smell of explosives or sound of gunfire. But he's still surrounded by soldiers. Seven other Ukrainians with missing limbs, most wearing army green and camouflage, sit nearby on black leather sofas and chairs, talking quietly, looking up expectantly, and occasionally laughing.

"I am thankful to God everything is OK," Voronin says, his boyish cheeks flushing as he wraps his fingers around a cross hanging around his neck. "I am hardly injured."

Hustling back and forth between Voronin and the other soldiers is the man they now look to for hope and healing: Yakov "Jacob" Gradinar, a former Ukrainian orthopedic surgeon who emigrated to Minnesota with his family in 2007. He began specializing in prostheses, developing innovations for frostbite victims and inventing a bent-knee prosthesis. Gradinar managed a Limb Lab clinic in Minneapolis and periodically brought amputees from war-ravaged African countries to be fitted with artificial limbs.

But when Russia invaded Ukraine last year, Gradinar and his family immediately began praying about how they could help their country.

Soon after, Gradinar met Yury Aroshidze, a Belarusian living in Minnesota who ran a trucking company. Together they realized God could use their combined talents in the Twin Cities to help wounded Ukrainians: Gradinar would primarily use his medical and prosthetic skills. Aroshidze would mastermind logistics. They named their organization the Protez Foundation. (*Protez* means "prosthetics" in Ukrainian.)

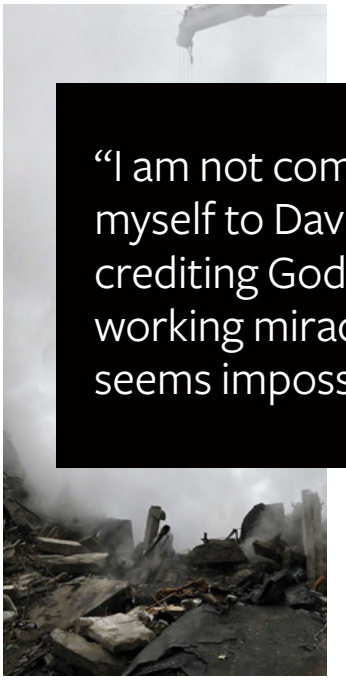
In Minneapolis, Aroshidze met a comedian friend of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy—himself once a comedian—and shared the idea for helping war amputees. The entertainer connected him with influencers in Ukraine who spread the word on social media.

Aroshidze and Gradinar recruited volunteers and donors to cover all the costs and got the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to help with visas, paperwork, and travel arrangements. Gradinar, who sprinkles conversations with Bible references, says



cutting through bureaucratic red tape and finding the right people to help launch Protez made him feel like David against Goliath.

"I am not comparing myself to David, but am crediting God with working miracles when it seems impossible," says Gradinar.



"I am not comparing myself to David, but am crediting God with working miracles when it seems impossible."

Protez now occupies 5,000-plus square feet of prime real estate in Oakdale, a suburb of St. Paul. The site belongs to Slumberland Furniture, whose owners bought the multibuilding campus seven years ago for their headquarters. Back then, the Slumberland owners stood in the parking lot and prayed God would help them make room for causes that served Him. When they invited Protez to move in for well below market rental rates, Gradinar tried to thank them, but they waved him off. "You are an answer to our prayers," they told him.

Gradinar welcomed the first group of amputees to Protez last July. This January, I watch him, his family and staff, and about 150 Ukrainian Americans greet the most recent group arriving at the Minneapolis–Saint Paul International Airport.

Downtime at Protez for Serhii Voronin, Valerii Kovalchuk, Volodymyr Glukhno, and other soldiers (left to right)



Children and adults wrapped in blue-and-yellow flags gather near the international flight exit doors. They sing along to an exuberant accordion player's repertoire of Ukrainian patriotic and folk songs. A traditionally dressed couple carries a wooden platter holding a round loaf of bread, ready for arriving soldiers to tear off a piece and dip into the adjacent bowl of salt—a Ukrainian custom for honored guests.

As soon as the security doors open, the baggage area erupts with cheering and applause. Eight amputees, most pushed in wheelchairs by flight attendants, roll in. At first, they look tired, but their faces light up with surprise when they see the crowd. One of the new arrivals is Serhii Voronin. As he wheels himself past Gradinar, the doctor reaches out and warmly grabs one of his hands in both of his. Voronin smiles.

Just a few hours later, Gradinar begins to measure the soldiers for their new limbs. The slim, dark-haired doctor kneels in front of Voronin to help him slip sock-like covers onto legs that now end just below the knee. He looks him in the eye and explains what he'll be doing. The other soldiers stop talking to watch and listen. Most fidget nervously with crutches or jiggle their legs.

Wade Hallstrom, co-owner of the prosthetics manufacturing business Heidi's Legs, waits nearby. He and his wife, Heidi, provide materials for Protez at cost and help fit the new limbs.

Techniques vary, but the process begins with a mold of the amputee's limb in plaster of Paris. The mold is

secured to a stand and then covered with thick plastic and carbon fiber that becomes the socket—the part that fits onto the residual limb. A small oven nearby heats the plastic to make it moldable. Pre-purchased titanium and stainless steel joints fasten onto the sockets.

Sanders, scissors, scrapers, and screwdrivers hang on one wall of Protez's small lab, ready to use for correcting and improving the socket fit. A blowtorch for bigger adjustments sits on the workbench. Hallstrom says after soldiers get new prosthesis, he and Gradinar modify the alignment for the best balance and movement. Wearing a prosthesis causes limb muscles to atrophy, requiring periodic socket adjustments for months to alleviate rubbing and sore spots.

Usually, lower limb amputees get two types of prostheses for differing activity levels. One has a stable foot for walking. The other has a more flexible foot for sports. Amputees who lose arms also get two devices—one strictly mechanical, another more cosmetically natural-looking. Physical and occupational therapists help the patients adjust, doing gait training and rehearsing daily living activities.

"We usually take six months to a year to help amputees get fully accustomed to prosthetics, but these soldiers are here for only three weeks," Hallstrom says. "They are super motivated—we actually have to tell them to slow down."

A series of gradual immigration

waves spanning more than a century has made Minneapolis home to a thriving Ukrainian community. In the 1880s, Ukrainians came here seeking work. Then geopolitical shifts, including the Russian Revolution, two world wars, and the Soviet collapse, continued the trend. Today, amid Russia's war on their country, native Ukrainians know Minneapolis is a place they can find friends and maybe even family—not to mention shops selling traditional old country goods and cabbage rolls that remind them of home.

Such small comforts are welcome as the civilian casualty count in Ukraine now approaches 20,000, including nearly 12,000 wounded. Ukrainian military casualties reportedly number about 100,000, but that hasn't been independently verified. And no one knows how many people have lost arms or legs.

After finishing with this group, Gradinar and his team will have fitted 41 soldiers and three civilians, including two children. The amputees learned about Protez online or through their doctors. Gradinar's waiting list now numbers about 750. To apply, patients must not have a prosthesis yet, their wounds must be healed, and they must have a passport. Protez gives civilians priority.

Voronin and the other soldiers would eventually have been fitted with prostheses in Ukraine, but artificial limb technology in the United States is light-years ahead by comparison. That explains why these soldiers, though war-weary and uncertain of their futures, were willing to travel halfway around the world for an appointment with Gradinar.

After finishing with Voronin, the doctor works his way to other soldiers seated nearby. He starts measuring the legs of Valerii Kovalchuk, a lanky 25-year-old with a downward-curving mustache and trimmed beard. Unlike the others, he's wearing a black and gray running suit from his soccer-playing days. He's spent much of the afternoon adeptly maneuvering around the building on crutches and going outside to smoke.

"We usually take six months to a year to help amputees get fully accustomed to prosthetics, but these soldiers are here for only three weeks. They are super motivated—we actually have to tell them to slow down."



YURII STEFANYAK/GLOBAL IMAGES UKRAINE VIA GETTY IMAGES



Gradinar and Protez team members work in the limb lab on Voronin's new legs.

Kovalchuk practices his English on me. "I realized I'd lost my foot when I saw it lying next to me," he says.

Just 21 days after joining the army, Kovalchuk was hiking through a forest bringing water to his brigade when he stepped on a land mine. The explosion blasted him 6 feet into the air before he thudded to the ground.

Two faulty tourniquets ripped while he tried to stanch his own bleeding before medics arrived. He spent four months recovering, then one day his doctor announced he'd found someone to help. Aroshidze called from Protez shortly afterward, and within a week Kovalchuk was in Minnesota. Gradinar will be customizing his new left foot.

Across from Kovalchuk sits Volodymyr Glukhno. A stocky man with close-cropped hair, he left his welding job to join the army as a sharpshooter after Russia invaded. The 47-year-old did his compulsory service as a young man, but when he saw frightened friends fleeing the country in response to the Russian advance, he signed up again. He didn't want to feel ashamed.

Then one hot, sunny August day, he stepped on what he calls "an anti-foot soldier"—a small, butterfly-shaped land mine with a vicious reputation. The device blew off his lower right leg. At one point during his long recovery, Glukhno grew so despondent he wanted to kill himself. The only reason he didn't, he says, is because he's an only child and didn't want to traumatize his mother.

These days, he's in much better spirits. He jokes with the interpreter, but then he turns serious: "I have never felt so much compassion as I have here in America. I have never felt such kindness."

Nelia Redka, 45, is the first female soldier Gradinar has helped. She stands just over 5 feet tall, with high cheekbones and auburn, chin-length hair. The front-line medic lost her right arm slightly below the shoulder after getting hit by incoming bomb shrapnel. Her husband and son also serve in the military, but here at Protez she often stands apart from the other soldiers.

Redka exudes self-consciousness and a quiet sadness. When she does talk, it's so soft the interpreter has to step closer to hear. She tells me she doesn't want her photograph taken because of her missing arm. As we talk, she dips the end of her wounded arm alternately into five Tupperware bowls filled with various-sized dried beans, peas, and legumes—nerve-stimulating therapy to help with phantom pain.

PHOTO BY SHARON DIERBERGER

The soldiers spend their second full day at Protez distracting themselves as they wait for the team to finish building their prostheses. They banter across a chessboard, shuffle decks of cards, grab snacks from nearby tables, or head outside for cigarettes. But tension hangs in the air. A Ukrainian American volunteer who's watched other groups go through the process says that's because the soldiers try to be tough but have survived unimaginable horror. They have difficulty picturing a good life with new limbs. They are skeptical of silver linings.

At lunchtime, Voronin rolls his wheelchair to another part of the building where volunteers from First Ukrainian Baptist Church have unloaded home-cooked lunches, like they do every working weekday at Protez. Inviting aromas from dishes like vareniki, a Ukrainian dumpling, and nalysnyky, dessert crepes, entice the soldiers and staff.

Gradinar encourages everyone to eat lunch together as a team at one long table. These soldiers didn't know each other before they boarded their flight. The doctor wants them to return to Ukraine as friends who can call on one another for support. He sits in the middle of the group, eating quickly and chatting away.

Volunteers are the backbone of Protez. Most come from a variety of Protestant or Catholic churches throughout the Twin Cities and western Wisconsin. Two volunteers are hosting Redka and another soldier. A benefactor recently donated a house where the other six soldiers are staying. Gradinar and Aroshidze used to lodge amputees in their own homes. The foundation received two donated vehicles, and therapists, dentists, and psychologists donate time for each new group.

Even Gradinar's wife and seven children help. Some are interpreters, several answer phones, one does accounting, one coordinates physical therapists, and another maintains inventory.

Gradinar brings in veterans or special guests like Kierstin Nelson, 33, one of his Minnesota patients, to talk candidly with each amputee group. Nelson lost her left leg from the hip down to necrotizing fasciitis—flesh-eating bacteria—then went blind. Her story rivets the soldiers, who lean forward to catch every word. Glukhno asks if she ever contemplated suicide. She says no, her faith and family prevented her: "God made my



Voronin steadies himself before attempting his first steps.

PHOTO BY SHARON DIERBERGER

life good," she says. Voronin listens, looks down at his own legs, then at Nelson. "You inspire us," he tells her through an interpreter.

Another regular guest, Adam Warden, is a paraplegic coach who leads workouts for the amputees. He trains them for mobility, strength, and balance, using floor ladders, cones, and agility drills. He gives tips for avoiding soreness and improving comfort. Warden, a triathlete, lost his left leg after a falling tree crushed it.

"They'll listen to me more than to a guy with both legs," he says. "And I served in Iraq, so they know I get it. ... Because these guys are with us only three weeks, I push them hard. I want them to figure out where it hurts so we can adjust the fit while they're still here."

That afternoon, it's finally time for Voronin to try on his new legs. He positions himself in his wheelchair between two shiny, lowered parallel bars. Gradinar fastens on his sockets. Voronin looks down at the shoes attached to the prosthetic feet, focusing.

Gradinar backs away, encouraging Voronin, who pulls himself to standing. He looks forward, then balances, getting used to the sensation of being upright again. Then, he tentatively takes his first steps in six months. Voronin slowly walks to the end of the bars, carefully pivots. and walks back. He turns to face Gradinar and all who've been watching, lets go of the bars, and grins. Everyone cheers.

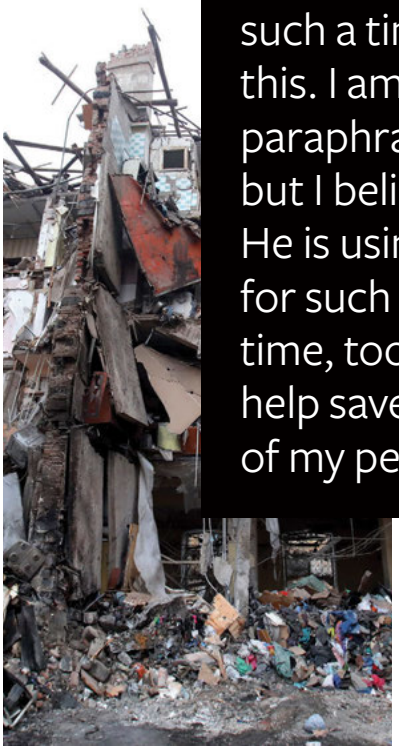
When it's Kovalchuk's turn, Gradinar attaches his new left foot and the young soldier can't contain himself. He takes off, rapidly striding around the room. More cheers. As the other soldiers see these men getting new limbs, the mood in the room shifts. Their faces say it all: That will soon be me.

After finishing their therapy in Minnesota, the group will head to South Carolina before returning to Ukraine. Each group spends its last week on a mini-vacation that Protez arranges somewhere in the United States. It includes therapeutic walking and some fundraising to benefit other amputees. Part of this group also has plans to visit Washington, D.C.

Several of these soldiers, including Kovalchuk, will return to the front lines. Others, like Voronin, plan to find noncombat ways to support the military. "I must find a job I can do because the enemy is not yet conquered," he says. And he can't wait to show his wife and 3½-year-old son how he can walk.

Glukhno is eager to get home and use his welding skills to build a big iron staircase in the house of benefactors who helped him and other wounded soldiers. "That is how I can thank them best," he says.

Redka, the female soldier, had grown happier by the end of her time in Minnesota. Her whole attitude changed, says Gradinar, when Protez brought in another amputee missing his arm at the same level as Redka. He inspired her with his proficiency using his prosthetic hand. And she was pleased to learn Protez would be giving her a cosmetic hand in addition to a robotic one. She will return to Ukraine to train medics.



"God used [Esther] for such a time as this. I am paraphrasing, but I believe He is using me for such a time, too—to help save some of my people."

"She found it very challenging not to have a cosmetic hand. Now she seems much more comfortable being around people and showing it," Gradinar says.

This spring the doctor and family members will help open a clinic run by his brother, also an orthopedic surgeon, in Ukraine's Transcarpathian region. Then the Ukrainian amputees he fits in Minnesota will have a place to go for prostheses adjustments near home.

But Gradinar's work in Oakdale won't stop. He eventually wants new groups of amputees to come weekly, instead of monthly, with 10 Ukrainians per group. For that he'll need another place to lodge visitors, but he isn't worried.

Off-handedly, Gradinar mentions he also pastors a small church in the Twin Cities, then says he's been thinking a lot about Esther this year as God deepens his trust: "God used her for such a time as this. I am paraphrasing, but I believe He is using me for such a time, too—to help save some of my people." ■

VYACHESLAV MADIYEVSKYY/UKRINFORM/NURPHOTO/AP



RISK OF RETURN

WEST WEIGHS TERROR THREAT POSED BY ISIS WIVES WHO COME HOME

by Jenny Lind Schmitt



Women and children at the Kurdish-run al-Hol camp

DELIL SOULEIMAN/AFP
VIA GETTY IMAGES

Kahina El Hadra waited three years to come home. Last July, she finally got her chance. Leaving behind the dusty desolation of northern Syria, she boarded a plane for Paris and settled in for the five-hour flight. When the plane landed, she walked down the steps and set her foot on French soil for the first time in nearly eight years. But she didn't get to enjoy it for long. French police quickly whisked her off to prison and dispatched her three children into the foster care system.



Among all the cases of French citizens who went to fight with ISIS in Syria, El Hadra's stands out. She was just 17 when she left France in 2014, and she married Samy Amimour soon after arriving in Syria. Months later, eluding detection, her new husband returned to France. On Nov. 13, 2015, he blew himself up during the Paris Bataclan terrorist attacks that killed 137 people, including seven attackers. In messages to friends, El Hadra crowed with pride and boasted about her dead husband's actions. A few months after the attacks, she gave birth to Amimour's daughter. That child is now 7 years old.



Women look after children at al-Hol.

DELIL SOULEIMAN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

When ISIS fell in 2019, the little girl, El Hadra, and two children from another relationship were detained in camps in northwest Syria. Roj and al-Hol are two Kurd-run camps designed to temporarily house refugees from the Syrian civil war. Since populations are constantly changing, it's difficult to pin down the precise number of refugees housed in the camps. But using the best estimates, Roj and al-Hol together contain more than 50,000 people. Those who have clear affiliations with ISIS are confined to a guarded camp within the larger one called the Annex.

The Annex in al-Hol holds 11,000 people, 62 percent of them children. Kurdish authorities have repeatedly called for countries to repatriate their citizens and lift them from the camps' deteriorating confines. That includes children born in Syria, who generally retain their parents' citizenship rights. But the international response has been slow. While some countries quickly brought citizens home to face justice and receive care, others are still weighing security risks and remain mired in political debate over bringing ISIS fighters—and more importantly, their children—home.

The dilemma French authorities faced over El Hadra and her children has replayed in other capitals: How do governments committed to human rights guarantee those rights to citizens held in a foreign detention camp because of the actions of their parents? How much does the danger posed by women who supported terrorists trump the rights of their innocent children?

France had nearly 1,600 citizens fighting for ISIS—the highest of any European Union country. And it has been the most reluctant to bring them home. The latest group of 15 women and 32 children to return to France arrived in late January. "It's immense progress," said lawyer Marie Dosé, who represents the advocacy group United Families Collective. "But we have to continue. Eighty-five to 90 percent of the children were under 6 when they arrived at the camps. The camps are the only childhood they know. They can't spend another winter there."

"The children are not to blame for the fatal life choices of their parents," German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said last October when 12 Germans returned home. "They are ultimately also victims of ISIS. We must therefore not leave them without prospects in the camps."

Germany began its repatriations in 2019, bringing back a total of 27 women, 80 children, and one adolescent. Other German children remain in the camps because their mothers have not given consent for them to leave as required by the German government.

Belgium brought back all of its citizens in June—16 children and six mothers. The last group of Dutch citizens returned home in November, making a total of 18 ISIS-affiliated women and 42 children. Spain brought back 15 of its citizens in January. Upon arrival, law enforcement officials take custody of the mothers, who are indicted for their links to terrorism. For their children, each nation has had



to develop a system for reintegrating them into both society and their extended families.

The U.S. State Department said in late 2020 it had repatriated all American supporters of ISIS known to be held by the Syrian Democratic Forces. One exception is Hoda Muthana, born in the United States to Yemeni parents. She left in 2014 to join ISIS in Syria. Muthana once had a U.S. passport, but in a rare case of birthright citizenship revocation, the Obama administration canceled her citizenship in 2016, citing her father's Yemeni diplomatic status at the time of her birth. Muthana, who says she was brainwashed by online recruiters and is ready to serve time if she can return to the United States, remains in Roj with her young son.

ABOUT 150 FRENCH CHILDREN and women remain in Roj and al-Hol, including some youngsters whose mothers refuse to have their children repatriated, with or without them. In those cases, Marie Dosé thinks the state should intervene. "In France, when a child is mistreated or abused, child protective services act to protect a child from its mother. In this instance, we must protect the children from mothers who insist that their children stay behind the barbed wire of a war zone." Dosé says a speedier reconnection of children with their grandparents and other relatives in France will help with reintegration: "The child enters a country, and he must understand that it is *his* country because his family is there."

But plenty of people disagree. In 2019, 80 percent of French people opposed repatriation. That figure has now dropped but, at 59 percent, remains a majority. A comment on the Facebook page of United Families Collective sums up the attitude: "No to their return to France. Their mothers made a bad choice. Too bad."

Some have labeled the children of terrorists "a ticking time bomb," implying the violence they experienced living under ISIS would cause them to become violent themselves. Others say that's exactly why they need to return to the West. Jean-Charles Brisard is president of the Paris-based Center for the Analysis of Terrorism. "You have to consider the environment in which they are growing up there [in the camps]," Brisard said. "The majority of



TOP: THE NEWS MOVEMENT/AP; BOTTOM: DELIL SOULEIMAN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

their mothers have not renounced the idea of the caliphate. It is still a radicalized environment. The children need support and psychological care, and they're not getting it there. The best way to create a 'ticking time bomb' is to leave them where they are."

Brisard regrets what he calls the government's "missed opportunity" to educate the public on the need for repatriations, for both the well-being of the children and the ability to bring their parents to justice.

The Kurdish authorities running the camps promised a judiciary process for the adults associated with ISIS. But that hasn't happened. Instead, the camp environments have deteriorated. In a report released in December, humanitarian aid group Doctors Without Borders documented gang-related murders, unlawful detentions and arbitrary punishments by security forces, childhood deaths from preventable diseases, and lack of access to education. Security forces forcibly take boys as young as 11 from their mothers and move them to all-male sections of the camps, leaving their mothers to wait for news in vain.

Seventy-nine children under 16 died in al-Hol in 2021 alone, according to the World Health Organization. To keep them safer, mothers make their kids stay inside their tents all the time. Doctors Without Borders found residents with chronic illnesses have limited and inconsistent access to necessary medications.

France originally pledged to repatriate all its citizens in 2019, but then switched to deciding on a case-by-case basis. That resulted in some kids returning without their mothers. The European Court of Human Rights condemned that policy in September, as did the United Nations Committee Against Torture in January. In a statement, the French-based United Families Collective lamented condemnation of a country known for the Enlightenment and the defense of human rights, but admits the criticism pushed France to change its policy to keep more kids and moms together.

Eight months after returning home, Kahina El Hadra still awaits her trial in a separate section for jihadists in the Women's Prison in Rennes, about 200 miles west of Paris. Social services evaluated her children in the first weeks after their arrival. They are now living with foster families trained in trauma care, in hopes of an eventual reunification with their extended family. ■

—with additional reporting by Mirjana Babloyan and Emma Freire

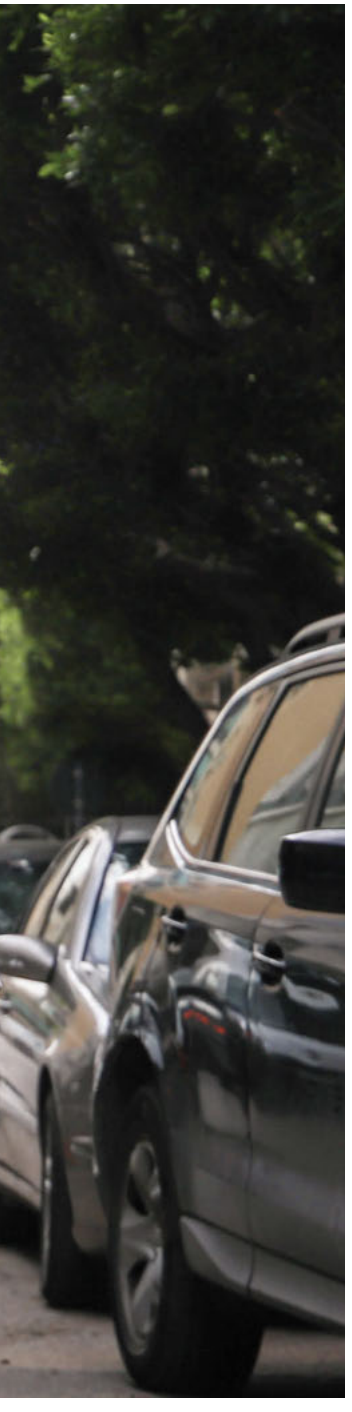
LEFT: Hoda Muthana. BELOW: Having abandoned the black all-covering face veils and niqabs they previously wore, a group of women, reportedly the wives of ISIS fighters, pose at Camp Roj.



NOTEBOOK



PHOTO BY GEORGE MGHAMES/GENESIS



BUSINESS

Finding a way to stay

Remote work and internships provide a financial lifeline to young Lebanese in economic crisis

by ONIZE OHIKERE

AFTER LEBANON'S financial crisis hit four years ago, life got harder for Patil Boyamian, a 29-year-old accountant from eastern Beirut.

Boyamian left her home in the city's hilly Ashrafieh area each morning before hopping on buses and taxis to get to her accounting job. When the company reduced her time to a few hours each week, she got a second job with a raise. But the devaluing lira—Lebanon's currency—rendered the raise worthless. Boyamian started struggling to pay the rising transportation fares and even buy basic items from stores.

"I had to calculate every penny I was spending," she recalled.

Others also felt the crunch, which sparked an exodus. Some 79,000 people left Lebanon in 2021—the highest number in five years, according to the Beirut-based Information International consultancy firm—and refugees fled to Europe by the thousands last year. But the hardships have prompted some organizations, including a Christian ministry, to step in with employment help. These groups' initiatives are providing remote jobs and other creative work that allow young Lebanese to be productive without leaving their home country.

Lebanon's economy began contracting after years of state corruption and financial mismanagement. The lira has lost more than 90 percent of its value, and around three-quarters of Lebanon's more than 5 million people now live in poverty. A deadly explosion at the Beirut port in 2020 compounded the problems.

When economic protests first flooded Lebanon's streets in 2019, they drew the attention of other Lebanese living abroad.

In San Francisco, Neal El-Jor Taouk helped to organize community town-hall meetings to brainstorm ways to send help back home. In March 2020, Taouk and a computer scientist co-founded Jobs for Lebanon and collaborated with other Lebanese living abroad to launch a digital recruiting platform connecting people in Lebanon with remote jobs in fields such as accounting, advertising, marketing, and design.

"Within the first week, we heard that the first person got hired and was able to sustain themselves," she said. The platform has so far provided more than 2,000 interviews and job offers, she said.

As Lebanon's crisis unfolded, Boyamian considered joining others to leave the →

Patil Boyamian walks in her Beirut neighborhood.



Graduates from the Horizons International internship program now work for Horizons in the communications department.

country. An uncle invited her to the United States, but she didn't want to leave her family and church fellowship behind.

While she considered her choices, a church friend told her about Horizons International, a Christian missions and aid ministry active across Lebanon. Boyamian learned the ministry was looking for accountants to work remotely with a U.S. consulting group.

"My dream was to work from home and have clients, so this job was meeting all my expectations," she said.

Boyamian is now among about 100 people who have gotten remote job offers through the ministry's programs responding to Lebanon's economic crisis.

Tamar Majoulian, a human resources coordinator with Horizons International, said the ministry first launched an internship program for young Lebanese late in 2020. Participants received training in graphic design, arts and worship, and web development. They received salaries working across the ministry's different divisions. Others have used the training to get work elsewhere. Majoulian said interns from the worship team have served in 25 Lebanese partner churches. "Some of the churches here in Lebanon don't have worship bands," she noted.

"Boyamian is now among about 100 people who have passed through the ministry's programs responding to Lebanon's economic crisis."

Abdulrahman Mesto was already looking into migration routes to leave Lebanon when he connected with Horizons. The 20-year-old had fled Syria and didn't want to return there. But he struggled to make ends meet.

"I was putting my life in danger," he recalled. "I wanted to provide for myself."

Mesto started a Horizons internship in web development in October 2021. He later switched to the international team, where he improved his broken English and began working as a translator.

He now works with visiting mission teams. He describes himself as a sort of tour guide. "Right now, I'm not thinking so much about leaving," he said.

Horizons partnered with a U.S.-based consultancy firm to hire remote workers like Boyamian. Majoulian said while Horizons is cutting back on paid internships, it is expanding the jobs program into fields like data entry and marketing.

Back at her Beirut home, Boyamian no longer has to catch a morning bus to work. She can pay her bills and has more time to run bank errands and serve on her church's financial team. She says she's started to enjoy her work.

The crisis still affects her schedule, though. Lebanon's national electricity body barely provides power: Boyamian's family home relies on a private company that supplies power using diesel generators, but even that is rationed.

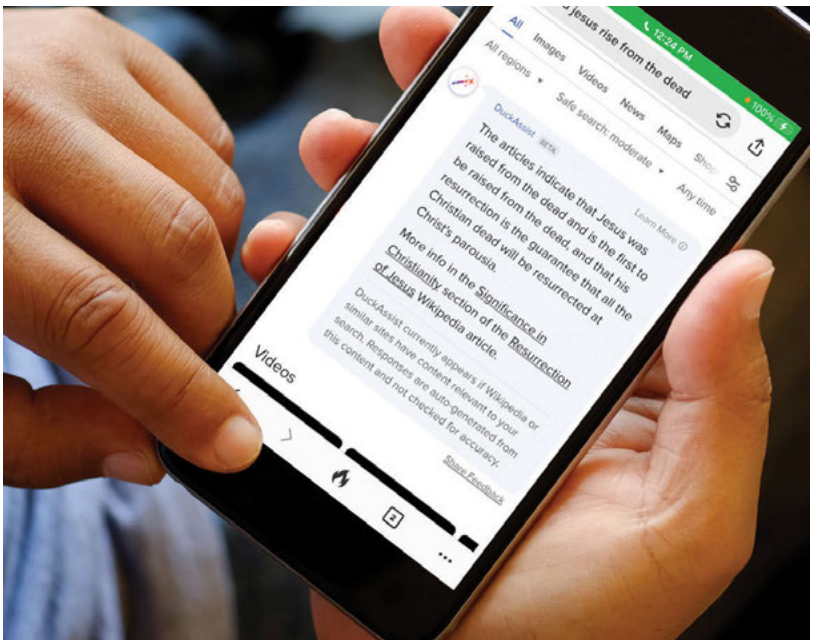
"I make sure my work hours coincide with the generator," she said. ■

TECHNOLOGY

A gaggle of questions

Field-testing DuckDuckGo's AI-powered search engine

by ELIZABETH RUSSELL



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE is the hot topic in the tech world, whether it's ChatGPT or Microsoft's new Bing chatbot. Search engine DuckDuckGo joined the fray on March 8, when it announced a limited rollout of its generative AI-assisted tool, DuckAssist. DuckDuckGo is marketing DuckAssist as an "instant answer" feature that draws from Wikipedia and similar sites to quickly summarize answers to common queries.

Can AI replace the task of hunting through pages of links? And will its answers be accurate and unbiased? To test out DuckAssist, I asked the search engine a variety of questions about religion, history, politics, and more. The early results, at least, suggest the feature isn't quite ready to replace due diligence.

DuckAssist appears as a small bubble that sometimes pops up above the regular search engine results in DuckDuckGo's browser. Press the "ask" button, and the feature generates an answer based mainly on Wikipedia articles, with a summary sometimes pulled word-for-word from Wikipedia. (A DuckAssist disclaimer notes the response has not been checked for accuracy.)

As of mid-March, if you typed a question into the DuckDuckGo browser's search engine, DuckAssist sometimes popped up and sometimes didn't. According to a spokesperson for the company, DuckAssist is most likely to appear in answer to fact-based queries phrased as questions. That was true when I asked "How many U.S. states are there?" (Answer: "50.")

When I asked some key questions about religion, the feature gave helpful responses. Question: "Did Jesus rise from the dead?" Answer: "The articles indicate that Jesus was raised from the dead ... and that his resurrection is the guarantee that all the Christian dead will be resurrected at Christ's parousia." Question: "Was Muhammad sent from Allah?" Answer: "According to Islamic doctrine, Muhammad was a prophet divinely inspired to preach and confirm the monotheistic teachings of Allah."

But the feature's responsiveness was spotty. It fairly summarized Mormonism but didn't pop up in response to the questions "Did Buddha achieve nirvana?" or "Who is Krishna?" It also didn't respond to straightforward questions like "Who is the president of the United States?" or "Who shot Abraham Lincoln?"

DuckAssist seems to avoid summarizing controversial social or political information: It did not respond to my more than 30 queries about abortion, LGBT issues, or American politics.

With its reliance on Wikipedia, a crowd-sourced online encyclopedia, DuckAssist may not always have reliable information about recent events. For instance, the search "Who is Alex Murdaugh?" on March 14 returned a DuckAssist answer that the businessman was "accused of murdering his wife and son in June 2021 and is currently on trial in South Carolina"—but Murdaugh was actually convicted on March 2 and given two life sentences on March 3.

DuckDuckGo founder and CEO Gabriel Weinberg wrote in the rollout announcement that there's a difference between what generative AI "could do well *in the future* and what it can do well *right now*." Right now, DuckAssist is more bullet point list than personable assistant. The company plans to improve the tool by adding more sources outside Wikipedia. Though currently available only on the DuckDuckGo browser, DuckAssist is slated to roll out soon to DuckDuckGo.com. ■

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY RACHEL BEATTY



SCIENCE

Marked by anxiety

Scientists hope a blood test can improve treatment

by HEATHER FRANK

DOCTORS OFTEN PRESCRIBE medications for anxiety, but some drugs can be addictive. Now researchers at Indiana University School of Medicine say they've developed a blood test that can detect anxiety and potentially help match patients with nonaddictive treatments.

In their research, published March 7 in *Molecular Psychiatry*, the scientists analyzed patient biomarker data. First, they measured differences in blood gene expression between psychiatric patients with self-reported low or high anxiety. Second, they evaluated the statistical significance of these biomarkers in patients with clinically severe anxiety. Third, the 95 biomarkers shown to significantly affect patients' anxiety were mapped to clinical outcomes.

The researchers discovered a new biomarker, ERCC6L2, that was strongly linked to high anxiety, and they found that 18 biomarkers could help predict the likelihood of future anxiety disorders. They said doctors could also use the biomarker info to predict optimal treatment options.

Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center is also developing a predictive test. Its method, relying on a supercomputer to crunch patient data, aims to tell with 75-80 percent accuracy which kids will develop anxiety.

BEE A LEARNER

The humble bumblebee may be smarter than you suppose. A new study from Queen Mary University of London, published March 7 in *PLOS Biology*, shows how bumblebees use social cues to learn and spread new behaviors.

In the study, biologists trained demonstrator *Bombus terrestris* bumblebees to operate a two-option puzzle box. Pushing a red tab clockwise—or a blue tab counterclockwise—unveiled a sugar reward.

During the training, observer bees simply watched. Later, when observer bees attempted to open the box, the vast majority (98.6 percent) chose the same method as the demonstrator bee.

A control experiment that lacked demonstrator bees confirmed the idea that the bumblebees relied more heavily on social cues than instinct. While observer bees with a demonstrator opened a median of 28 boxes per day, control bees lacking a demonstrator opened a median of just one box a day. *—H.F.*

DIABETIC SURGE IN CHILDREN AND TEENS

Research continues to show a long-term diabetes surge among American youth ages 19 and younger. In an analysis spanning 2002-2018 and published Feb. 28 in *The Lancet Diabetes & Endocrinology*, researchers noted a 2 percent annual increase in Type 1 (juvenile) diabetes, and a 5.3 percent annual increase in Type 2 (adult) diabetes. In December, researchers projected Type 2 diabetes among youth could increase nearly 700 percent by 2060. *—H.F.*



ISTOCK

LAW

Feeling offended

Some Supreme Court justices disagree over whether an "offended observer" can sue

by STEVE WEST



CAN PLAINTIFFS bring a lawsuit simply because of psychic harm—hurt feelings? At least two Supreme Court justices don't think so.

In March the court declined to review a years-old Florida case involving First Amendment claims. In 2014, after a series of shootings left several children injured, Ocala, Fla., Chief of Police Greg Graham reached out to the local community for assistance in finding witnesses to the shootings. A local minister suggested and planned a prayer vigil, and Graham co-signed and posted a letter encouraging attendance at the vigil on the police department's Facebook page.

Florida residents Art Rojas and Lucinda Hale showed up at the vigil, but they didn't come to pray. Both atheists, they claimed the police-sponsored event's religious nature offended them and violated the First Amendment's bar against the establishment of religion.

A U.S. District Court ultimately agreed with the plaintiffs. But in a March 6 order dismissing the city's appeal, Supreme Court Justices Neil Gorsuch and Clarence Thomas noted their disagreement with allowing such "offended observers" to sue.

In his dissent, Thomas pointed to a 1982 Supreme Court opinion. It ruled that "the psychological consequence presumably produced by observation of religious conduct with which one disagrees" was not enough to allow someone to sue.

Yet Thomas noted that, despite the ruling, lower courts often allow claims based on noneconomic injuries. "This Court's intervention has become increasingly necessary, as time has demonstrated that this problem is not going away by itself," he concluded.



CLASS-ACTION REPRIEVE

Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, facing donor lawsuits after claims of sexual misconduct by its founder were published after his death in 2020, won't face a class action for misuse of donor funds.

A federal court concluded in March that a lawsuit by a group of donors against the Georgia-based ministry couldn't be broadened to include donors nationwide over a 16-year period. U.S. District Judge Thomas Thrash Jr. called the scope of the request "inequitable," as no donors were actually harmed and only a very small amount of contributed money was allegedly used to facilitate or cover up the sexual misconduct.

Thrash called attention to the harm that would be caused by compelling the ministry to disclose its donor lists: "Identification of the donors as financial supporters of a 'sexual predator' would have an impermissible chilling effect upon their First Amendment rights." *—s.w.*

ILLUSTRATION BY KRIEG BARRIE; ZACHARIAS: RAVI ZACHARIAS/FACEBOOK



VOICES **ANDRÉE SEU PETERSON**

Needing the eggs

Because life costs money, we participate in a banking system that runs on illusion

"THIS GUY GOES TO A PSYCHIATRIST and says, 'Doc, my brother's crazy; he thinks he's a chicken.' And the doctor says, 'Well why don't you turn him in?' And the guy says, 'I would, but I need the eggs'" (Woody Allen, *Annie Hall*).

That's how I felt walking out of the bank today. My little transaction in there was totally absurd because everybody knows it's an illusion. Nevertheless, I fully intend to keep going and participating in this charade because, well, I need the eggs.

Here is the bargain I have with the bank: They pretend to give me money that is backed by hard assets, and I pretend they really have assets. That is to say, they pretend to give me money they really don't have, and I pretend to believe they really have it. I then drive to the food store and they accept what's in my hand as a fair exchange for their bread and milk. It works—for now—because we all are in the game.

The insides of the bank are a brilliant bit of theater. Our local branch has a floor-to-ceiling walk-in vault with a thick 22-ton door that would laugh at gunpowder, nitroglycerin, and acetylene torches. Surely there is gold in that beast, right? To be sure, I've never been inside myself; for all I know it contains only Main Line ladies' jewelry and secret KFC sauce recipes.

The U.S. government needs money too, and they don't seem any more worried than I about whether it is real. They ring up the Federal Reserve and say, "Hey, we need $10 billion to run our affairs," and the Fed says, "Sure thing, we'll buy $10 billion of your bonds." So the government takes pieces of paper and writes the words "Treasury Bond" on them and gives those pieces of paper to the Federal Reserve.

The Fed takes their own pieces of paper and draws impressive designs on them and sends them over to the U.S. government. So they trade bits of paper.

Of course today it's not done by paper at all but by computers and clicks. Godfrey Bloom is a controversial figure but also a financial economist and a former member of the European Parliament. He told a stunned audience in Strasbourg in 2013 that the whole banking system is a scam:

"All the banks are broke. Deutsche Bank, Royal Bank of Scotland, they're all broke. And why are they broke? It isn't an act of God. It isn't some sort of tsunami. They're broke because we have a system called fractional reserve banking. Which means that banks can lend money that they don't actually have. ... We have something called quantitative easing, counterfeiting by any other name. The artificial printing of money, which if any ordinary person did, they'd go to prison. ... And yet governments and central banks do it all the time. ... And we talk rather loosely about deposit guarantees. So when banks go broke through their own incompetence and chicanery, the taxpayer picks up the tab. It's theft from the taxpayer."

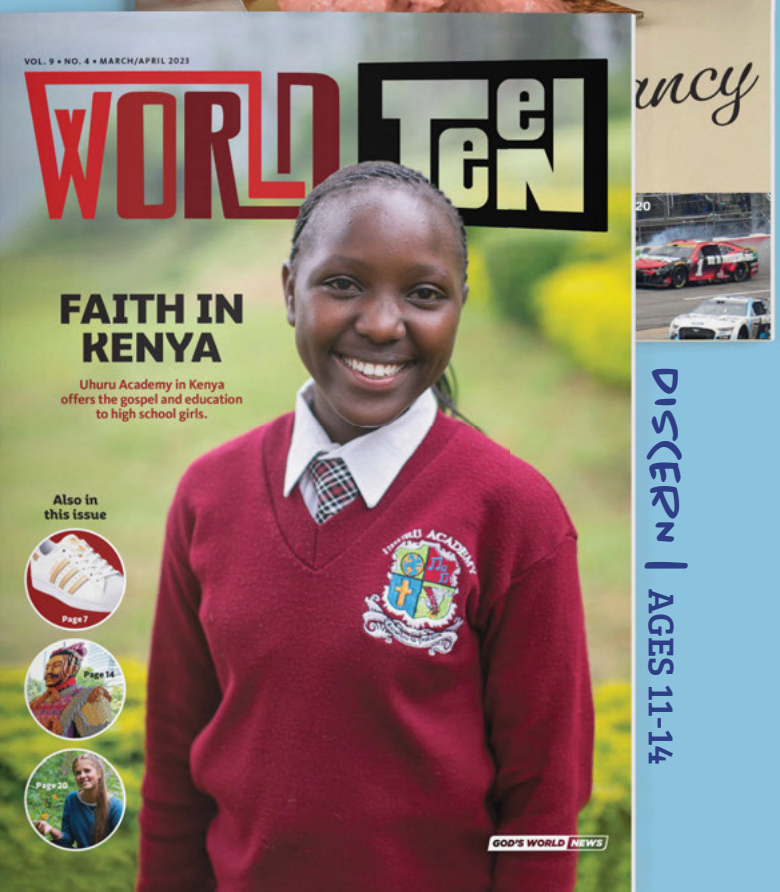
The nations' contracts with their citizens are broken. There is no money. Everybody suspects that disaster is in our future. But the attitude is like that of King Hezekiah when the prophet told him disaster is in his future because of his foolishness. Not during Hezekiah's own time, precisely, but postponed until his children's and grandchildren's time:

"Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, 'The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good.' For he thought, 'There will be peace and security in my days'" (Isaiah 39:8).

Meanwhile, here I am with my newly purchased certificate of deposit and money market account. Conjured out of thin air. But I tend to them like the mad brother tending to his delusional chicken. Because, for now, I need the eggs. ■

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A healthcare worker prepares to administer a Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine.

Threading the needle

The challenges of reporting on America's vaccine controversy

by LEIGH JONES

EMMA FREIRE SPENT MOST of the pandemic in Brazil, where she lived with her husband and three children. She watched the division fracturing America from afar but escaped much of the related emotional fallout. Taking an objective look at the controversy became one of her first assignments for WORLD. After she finished her reporting, I asked her to reflect on what she'd learned. Here's what she told me.

What surprised you most as you reported this story? I was amazed how big the issue of adverse reactions to the vaccine has become. This feels like a dam that's about to burst. Whenever I mentioned I was writing a story about COVID-19 vaccines, people would immediately start telling me about either their own adverse reaction or someone else's. I applaud Dr. Gregory Poland for trying to bring this discussion into the mainstream so that it's healthy and data-driven. Right now, it's mostly happening on social media, where a lot of the speculation is sketchy at best.

You interviewed two doctors who are believers but came down differently on the issue of COVID vaccines. What did that say to you with respect to the larger national debate? Gregory Poland and Jay Bhattacharya both have a strong Christian witness and give God the glory for their professional success. Poland supports COVID-19 vaccines for everyone, but Bhattacharya only recommends them for the groups most at risk. In 2021, views like Bhattacharya's were censored. I think the vaccines would not be as controversial as they still are today if we had a more open debate. Unfortunately, silencing anyone who deviated even slightly from public health recommendations became a hallmark of pandemic policies.

WORLD readers also have different views on the necessity, efficacy, and safety of the COVID vaccines and now the boosters. How did you attempt to cover this story in a way that addresses multiple viewpoints? I kept thinking of brothers and sisters in Christ I know who took different views on the vaccines. I knew some of them would read my story and wanted to ensure they all felt I had treated their beliefs respectfully. With such a controversial topic, I was mindful to constantly steer straight down the middle.

How would you characterize experts' willingness to speak with you on this subject? Each of the doctors I interviewed, even the most pro-vaccine, seemed to welcome an honest discussion. For a while in America, you could be labeled a "science denier" for asking any questions about the vaccine. But that wasn't the attitude of the scientists I interviewed. ■

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