

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

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

— MARY BAKER EDDY

WEEK OF APRIL 13, 2026 | VOLUME 118 – ISSUE 21

C O N T E N T S

FROM THE EDITORS

Finding stories that overcome political barriers 1

NEWS: DISPATCHES

In Israel, outrage over settler violence in West Bank 1

Kremlin set to silence online messaging apps in Russia 1

Anonymous market moves suggest insider trading 2

Out in space, Canada and the US are getting along
just fine. 2

With war abroad, US faces terror threats back home 3

Social media companies will appeal rulings that they harm
teens 3

Anthropic's court win highlights ongoing AI safety debate. . 3

NUMBERS IN THE NEWS 4

OUR WORLD 4

NEWS: GLOBAL CURRENTS

In consequential vote, Hungary weighs 'illiberal
democracy' 5

Some MAGA influencers are taking a shine to solar power . . 6

With left-wing star power, could AOC seek White House? . . 7

Iran campaign reveals US dependency on Europe 9

THE EXPLAINER

ICE is expanding detention.
Here's why it wants more beds. 10

REPORTERS ON THE JOB. 11

PEOPLE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Children of war call Our Father's Cleft home 11

EDITORIALS

The big lift in intelligence from AI 12

Ban teens from social media? Ask first. 13

When spring bursts forth with renewal 13

THE HOME FORUM

Hope in the soil and stones 14

LENS AND LIGHT. 15

A CHRISTIAN SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE 15

BOOKS

The evolution of Lincoln's immigration ideals 15

She sees the forest *and* the trees 17

What are you reading?
Monitor readers share their favorite titles. 18

CULTURE

Ancient art form weaves new opportunities 18

SUDOKU 19

CROSSWORD 20

Finding stories that overcome political barriers

There can be a perception that clean energy is a Democratic issue. Progressives, according to conventional wisdom, are the ones worried about the environment, advocating solar power and driving electric cars. Republicans, this same line of thought goes, are focused on oil.

But this is not the story I found when I was the Monitor's climate and environment reporter. And it's not the story that writer Scott Baldauf found in his piece this week about the new MAGA push for solar.

For years, conservative clean-energy groups and activists have advocated low-carbon power sources, lobbying state and federal government officials to support this expanding technology. I regularly interviewed sources from across the political spectrum who were pro-solar and pro-battery.

Those boosters who identified as conservative tended to be motivated not by a fear of climate change, but by a desire for energy abundance. American ingenuity, they believed, combined with rapidly expanding technology, could meet the power needs of the 21st century. Their vision included tapping into fossil fuels while also moving full force into solar, wind, and batteries, as well as nuclear and geothermal power. And like renewable power supporters from the progressive side, many conservatives worried that the politicization of certain energy sources would end up undermining the country's quest for energy security and economic prosperity – and therefore its long-term environmental sustainability.

Now, Scott writes, prominent conservative influencers are also voicing this argument.

This matters, not only to those worried about growing pressure on the country's energy and power infrastructure, and not only

to those who are concerned about the impact of greenhouse gas emissions on the planet's complex systems.

It matters because it shows how, in some of the most contentious issues of our time, it is possible for people to find common ground.

"These conservative commentators are saying they support renewables for basically the exact reasons climate activists have been shouting about for years," says Scott Blanchard, the editor of this piece, who also spent years working on energy stories in oil and gas states.

One of our goals at the Monitor is to find and highlight these places of commonality. These deep points of connection can bring about empathy and civility – even when there are lasting disagreements about policies and political outcomes.

It is important to highlight individuals who take stands that appear to break ideological norms, Scott Blanchard adds. Their example can open doors for readers to have civil conversations in their own lives; opening the aperture of what positions are acceptable and breaking the constraints of political tribalism. ■



By Stephanie Hanes
Print Editor

In Israel, outrage over settler violence in West Bank

With missiles from Iran and Lebanon raining down on Israel and fighter jets striking Tehran, Lt. Gen. Eyal Zamir, the Israel Defense Forces chief of staff, visited the West Bank to issue a warning over a surge of settler violence against Palestinians.

Speaking to IDF officers, General Zamir's wording was strong and guarded at the same time. He did not refer explicitly to "settlers" as the perpetrators or to "Palestinians" as the victims. But he did say the offenders endanger Israel's security as well as its values.

"It is unacceptable that during a multifront war the IDF is also forced to confront a threatening minority from within. These are rioters who do not represent the greater population," he said in a statement.

"In reality, they endanger residents, security, stability, and our values as a people and as a state."

According to Israeli rights group Yesh Din, 257 incidents of settler violence or harassment against Palestinians were reported across the West Bank in the first 25 days after Israel's Feb. 28 attack on Iran.

The incidents, spanning 116 Palestinian communities, included shootings, physical assaults, property damage, and threats. Settlers killed six Palestinians during that period, Yesh Din says.

The remarks by General Zamir, hand-picked as a loyalist by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, suggest an increase of tensions with the more extreme members of Mr. Netanyahu's coalition, with whom the military chief has already clashed over Gaza policies.

Indeed, the general called on Israeli authorities to take action against the settler violence, urging them to "stop it before it is too late."

In doing so, he effectively pointed a finger at the Israeli police, the Shin Bet security service, and the coalition itself.

The violence has been so extreme it has drawn condemnation from politicians, rabbis, former security heads, educators, and former ambassadors and senior Foreign Ministry officials.

In a post on social platform X, Rabbi Yehuda Gilad, who heads a yeshiva in northern Israel, condemned an attack on a nearby village in the West Bank as a "pogrom."

The violence is "a desecration of God's name and a distortion of the Torah," he told the Monitor.

– Shoshanna Solomon / Contributor

Kremlin set to silence online messaging apps in Russia

In recent weeks, residents of Moscow have been hit by a wave of orchestrated internet and mobile phone disruptions, creating digital mayhem in some quarters. In addition, the government seems to be "throttling" – or deliberately slowing down – WhatsApp and Telegram, Russia's most widely used messaging apps, which the government wants to replace with a Russian-developed super-app called Max.

Officials hint that it is part of a shadowy electronic war with Ukrainian enemies. But some analysts worry it's a dress rehearsal for a plan to corral the country's formerly open digital space and expel foreign influences.

Russia has long planned to establish a "sovereign internet" that can stand alone, says Sarkis Darbinyan, a digital rights cyberlawyer. "The idea is that if the global West splits off Russia from the internet, then Russian authorities have the complete infrastructure and methods in place to keep a self-sufficient Russian internet working."

Authorities have made little effort to explain the current flurry of disruptive measures, which are apparently countrywide. In Moscow, they have affected many businesses and have sometimes left people unable to book a taxi, pay with a bank card, or even make a phone call. The outages are so far localized and temporary, but unpredictable.

Russia's media regulator has for years been trying to make social media obey increasingly strict national security laws. Foreign-based platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, and X were blocked for refusing to house their data for Russian users on servers in Russia. Now, the agency is throttling foreign-based messaging apps, making them largely unusable for Russian internet users without a virtual private network.

"There is a bureaucratic battle over this. Many state agencies, and lots of officials, use Telegram in their work. Soldiers in the [war in Ukraine] depend on it," says Anton Merkurov, an independent media expert. "But ... the Kremlin sees [these apps] as organizing tools for protesters, and conduits for dissent."

There seems little enthusiasm for Max, despite the fact that it performs all the functions of the other platforms that are under attack.

"Max is not doing well," says Mr. Merkurov. "People don't want to use it. They know that what comes from the government is never good."

– Fred Weir / Special correspondent

Anonymous market moves suggest insider trading

Reports of big payouts from market trades that appeared to foresee major actions by the Trump administration – potentially with insider information – are becoming increasingly common.

In late March, the oil futures market saw a spike in trades just minutes before President Donald Trump announced a pause in plans to attack Iranian power plants. The unidentified trader or traders had placed more than a half billion dollars in trades, according to the Financial Times.

Similarly, the prediction market Polymarket saw a sharp increase in bets that proved lucrative right before the U.S. went to war against Iran and, earlier, invaded Venezuela.

Critics say these well-timed, anonymous market plays strongly suggest insider trading.

"This is just astounding corruption," Democratic Sen. Chris Murphy of Connecticut said in a social media video. People "are making money off of their inside information, their access to what President Trump is going to do or what he is going to say."

Senator Murphy, along with Rep. Greg Casar of Texas, has intro-

duced a bill banning prediction markets from "wagering on government actions, terrorism, war, assassination, and events where an individual knows or controls the outcome."

But some experts say new laws won't fix the problem.

"Insider trading is already illegal," says Todd Phillips, an assistant professor of law at Georgia State University's business school. Enforcement is the real issue, he suggests.

Concern about conflicts of interest has put additional scrutiny on President Trump's soaring personal fortune, now estimated at \$6.5 billion, up \$1.4 billion from March 2025. A Department of Justice memo recently revealed that the classified documents Mr. Trump was charged with illegally retaining in 2021, in a case that was later dismissed, were related to his business interests.

To ethics experts, it underscores an alarming erosion in norms around profiting off government work or connections – norms that served to reassure voters that public officials were putting the interests of the country ahead of their own. Today, just 17% of the U.S. public trusts the federal government to do what is right for the country, down from 77% in 1964, according to Pew Research Center.

– Linda Feldmann / Staff writer

Out in space, Canada and the US are getting along just fine

On the ground in Ottawa, Ontario, and Washington, Canadian-American relations are the worst they've been since the War of 1812.

In space, it's a different story.

Canadian astronaut Jeremy Hansen is expected to join three American colleagues for the much-anticipated Artemis II mission, a NASA milestone for moon exploration.

Mr. Hansen will be the first Canadian, and first non-American, to go on a mission around the moon.

The American-Canadian team will lift off at a time when the United States and Canada are caught up in a trade war, President Donald Trump has spent the past year threatening to annex Canada, and Prime Minister Mark Carney has become an advocate for "middle powers" establishing new global partnerships, from military to trade, that exclude the U.S.

But those rifts have not yet divided the space arena.

The two countries are together sending a crew to do what only 24 people have done before – leave low-Earth's orbit. The 10-day mission – the first journey to the moon by astronauts since 1972 – is a point of national pride for Canada, with its much smaller space program, and the U.S.

At a time of contentious geopolitics, it is also a moment to celebrate the wonder of exploration and working together to do so.

The crew will include the first woman and person of color to ever fly around the moon, too.

"It's pushing a frontier, and that's what we do in exploration and discovery and science and research in general," says Julie Payette, veteran Canadian astronaut, engineer, and the former Governor General of Canada.

"We push that frontier of whatever the known world is, and at the moment the frontier we have as humans, in terms of physics, is the moon."

She adds: "They are doing it not solely for one nation or solely

for one people. The entire Artemis crew is going out there for everybody on Earth.”

– Audrey Thibert / Staff writer

With war abroad, US faces terror threats back home

As the United States began attacks on Iran in late February, the federal government braced for possible retaliation at home. To increase security, Hunter Army Airfield in Savannah, Georgia, joined hundreds of other installations in suspending the “trusted traveler” program at its main gate.

Alerts then went out to the nation’s 55 Joint Terrorism Task Forces, local law enforcement, and sensitive industries, reminding them that Iran and its proxies have the capability of striking the U.S. in retaliation for American strikes in the Middle East.

Since the start of the war, the U.S. has sustained a series of small but deadly attacks – including a fatal shooting at a Texas bar – said to be linked to recent Middle East violence. Then came an Iran-sponsored cyberattack against a Michigan medical equipment company. More concerns were raised by reports of unidentified drones flying over military bases including the Washington-area Fort McNair, where Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth are among the residents. The concerns have served as a reminder that entities opposing America – including Iran and its proxies – have the capacity to carry out asymmetrical warfare against U.S. targets.

The FBI says that last year saw a 35% increase in counterintelligence arrests, and multiple foiled terrorism plots. More specifically, U.S. counterterrorism agencies have discovered and stopped 17 Iranian-inspired plots in the past five years, according to the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, in New York.

The FBI, in a statement to the Monitor, declined to answer whether staff shake-ups have affected agency readiness. “But the FBI continuously assesses and realigns our resources to ensure the safety of the American people,” the statement read.

Since President Donald Trump took office, the FBI, the nation’s main counterterrorism organization, has seen several high-level firings and resignations, including 10 to 12 agents and staff from a New York counterintelligence unit that specializes in Iran threats, tracking foreign spies, and investigating plots to assassinate U.S. officials.

FBI Director Kash Patel ordered the dismissals just days before the U.S. launched Operation Epic Fury, with Mr. Patel alleging the agents took “improper investigative steps” in a court case about Mr. Trump’s handling of classified documents.

“I’m worried that we’re taking qualified people and picking fights with one another across party lines rather than making sure we protect ourselves and keep ourselves safe,” said Democratic Rep. Chrissy Houlahan of Pennsylvania, during a recent hearing.

– Patrik Jonsson / Staff writer

Social media companies will appeal rulings that they harm teens

Within the space of 24 hours, tech giant Meta lost two landmark court cases in two states related to the alleged harms of social media for children.

In a Los Angeles lawsuit, a jury found on March 25 that Meta and YouTube’s negligent designs of their social media platforms were a substantial factor in causing harm to the mental health of a young woman. The day before, in a separate case in New Mexico, a jury concluded that Meta misled consumers about the safety of its platforms and enabled child exploitation. That case was brought by the state’s Justice Department.

The verdicts could open the way for similar lawsuits by other states and individuals. Meta said it would appeal both cases. In the Los Angeles trial, the 20-year-old plaintiff, identified only by her first name, Kaley, testified that she began using Google’s YouTube at age 6 and then Meta’s Instagram three years later. At issue was whether YouTube and Instagram are addictive. Kaley’s lawyers claimed that the platforms hook children by design.

The jury voted 10-2 that Meta was negligent in its design, that this neglect was a significant factor in causing harm to Kaley’s mental health, and that the company knew of the dangers Instagram poses to children. (At least nine of the 12 jurors had to agree for the companies to be held liable.) Meta and YouTube were ordered to pay \$3 million – 70% and 30% of that amount, respectively – to the plaintiff.

Meta had argued that Kaley’s challenges predated her use of social media. It also touted safety features, such as parental controls, teen accounts, and age-related restrictions for mature content. YouTube said its data showed that Kaley’s usage of the site declined over time.

Celebrating his state’s win in the other case, New Mexico Attorney General Raúl Torrez called the jury’s verdict “a historic victory for every child and family who has paid the price for Meta’s choice to put profits over kids’ safety.”

– Stephen Humphries / Staff writer

Anthropic’s court win highlights ongoing AI safety debate

A federal judge has temporarily blocked the Pentagon from labeling AI company Anthropic a supply chain risk.

The legal development came amid the Trump administration’s efforts to punish the artificial intelligence firm after it refused to let its technology be deployed in fully autonomous weapons or for surveillance of Americans.

U.S. District Judge Rita Lin said in her ruling that the “broad punitive measures” appeared arbitrary and capricious.

The dispute has brought long-standing tensions between national security and the ethical development of AI into the national spotlight. It also represents the latest instance in which AI’s swift integration into business and government has collided with growing concerns that its development is leaving safety protocols behind.

In late February, Anthropic refused to allow the Pentagon unre-

stricted use of its technology, insisting on limitations it said were essential for safety. The Defense Department had used the company's technology in operations to seize Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro in January and in the Iran strikes that began on Feb. 28.

The Pentagon responded to Anthropic's demand by designating the company "a supply chain risk to national security."

After negotiations fell apart, Anthropic's competitor OpenAI signed a deal with the Pentagon with less stringent restrictions than Anthropic had sought.

Anthropic has sued the Trump administration, saying its action was "unlawful."

– Caitlin Babcock/ Staff writer

NUMBERS IN THE NEWS

6 in 10

The share of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders who say President Donald Trump has hurt rather than helped immigration and border security, according to a new poll. About two-thirds of this group also think Trump has "gone too far" in deporting immigrants who are living in the U.S. illegally.

56

The percentage by which the United Kingdom will slash its aid budget by 2028-29, resulting in a £900 million (\$1.2 billion) reduction in bilateral aid to Africa. The reduction is part of £6 billion (\$8 billion) in budget cuts that will fund higher defense spending in the U.K.

1 in 10

The share of Black people in the United States who are immigrants, according to new Pew Research Center data. The Black immigrant population has more than doubled in the 2000s, from 2.4 million in 2000 to 5.6 million in 2024.

7

Tons, the weight of a meteor that exploded over Ohio in mid-March. The 6-foot-wide fireball was traveling at 44,000 miles per hour when it hit Earth's atmosphere, according to NASA estimates.

2,312

Ounces of gold that are being stashed in an old newspaper building in Wyoming. The state bought 72 gold bars, worth about \$11.6 million as of mid-March, after passing a law late last year mandating the inclusion of precious metals in its investment portfolio to mitigate economic downturns.

– Audrey Thibert / Staff writer

Sources: The Associated Press, National Opinion Research Center, The Guardian, Pew Research Center, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal

OUR WORLD

"For all of Chile, this is a milestone."

That's how recently inaugurated President José Antonio Kast described the excavation of a trench to build a border wall between Chile and Peru. Mr. Kast ran on a promise to keep immigrants from crossing into Chile illegally, blaming migrants for escalating crime and violence in what is still one of South America's safest and most stable countries. Chile's foreign-born population has grown rapidly, from 600,000 in 2015 to 1.6 million in 2024, according to United Nations data.

– Whitney Eulich

Feeding Russia's war machine

A refinery in Ireland may be inadvertently supplying the Russian war machine in Ukraine – highlighting the European Union's difficulty in crafting sanctions on basic but military-critical products. Per an Irish Times investigation, a plant in County Limerick has shipped millions of tons of aluminum oxide to Russian smelters. Much of the resulting aluminum went toward arms production. The Irish and Belgian governments have promised to investigate. "We cannot support Ukraine with billions of euros on the one hand, and on the other allow European raw materials to feed the Russian arms industry," said the Belgian foreign minister.

– Arthur Bright

'Lobsters' claw their way into Chinese life

"Raising a lobster" – a popular online phrase that means to adopt the artificial intelligence agent OpenClaw – is all the rage in China. As China promotes rapid integration of AI across government, industry, and society, a multitasking "lobster" that can send emails and schedule flights has appeal. Local governments hope the agent will allow individuals to become one-person companies, though a Chinese regulatory agency issued an alert in mid-March warning consumers against downloading the agent, citing security and fraud risks. OpenClaw, released in November by an Austrian developer, is freely available online.

– Ann Scott Tyson

Kids these days ...

Many perceive children today to be worse off than kids in past generations. But "there are a number of trends that are in a positive direction," a senior scholar at Child Trends, a nonprofit research organization focused on child and family well-being, told Scientific American. Recent studies show kids today are highly interested in helping others, less narcissistic, and have better emotional regulation and delayed-gratification skills. IQs also have increased. Perhaps most surprising, some studies show that kids who spend more time on social media become more empathetic over time.

– Audrey Thibert

SZENTENDRE, HUNGARY

In consequential vote, Hungary weighs ‘illiberal democracy’

Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz party have held office for 16 years. A reform-minded lawyer, backed by frustrated young voters, might soon end that streak.

By **Dominique Soguel** / Special correspondent

It might have been a gray, rain-battered evening. But that wasn't going to stop potential voters keen to see the man who could unseat Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, one of the European Union's most entrenched and controversial leaders.

Young voters stood alongside curious parents and grandparents, all eager to hear Péter Magyar, lawyer and dynamic leader of the Tisza party, as he barnstormed through this riverside town just north of Budapest. A former government insider turned critic, Mr. Magyar represents the most credible threat to Mr. Orbán to date.

Mr. Orbán and his conservative Fidesz party have been in power since 2010. But a string of scandals, combined with economic pressures driving down quality of life – and young Hungarians to go abroad – have left them both on the defensive ahead of Hungary's April 12 parliamentary elections.

Analysts say the opportunity for change is real. “The things that are happening are unprecedented in Hungarian history,” says Balázs Vető, an analyst at the Forrás Institute for Social Research.

“The challenger to Fidesz is a movement that hardly existed two years ago, yet now commands a level of support no opposition force has achieved before,” he adds. “If this continues, there is a real chance that Péter Magyar could win.”

Hungary at a crossroads

Hungary under Mr. Orbán has come to define what he himself calls an “illiberal democracy.” Observers say the country is marked by widespread corruption and entrenched nepotism, shrinking media freedoms, and a steady consolidation of power.

Since 2010, the Fidesz government has reshaped the electoral system to its advantage. It has redesigned constituency boundaries and installed a single-round, winner-take-all system in Parliament. It has also granted voting rights to ethnic Hungarians abroad.

Despite all this, polling data shows Mr. Magyar's center-right Tisza in the lead ahead of the election, with clear margins in every age bracket under 60. That could mean the electoral system designed to favor Fidesz could be turned against it.

Mr. Magyar frames the vote as a choice between East and West, playing on public concerns about a potential Brexit-like departure from the EU. Mr. Orbán has repeatedly clashed with Brussels over issues ranging from the rule of law to Russia's war in Ukraine.

“This is a referendum,” Balázs Tóthmajor, the Tisza candidate in Szentendre, told The Christian Science Monitor. “We should decide whether we should stay in the EU or choose another option. A lot of youngsters understand that and try to support us.”

A youth movement

Indeed, the party's reformist edge is sharpest among younger voters. Surveys show that only 10% to 12% of young voters would back Fidesz, compared with about 60% for Tisza. With nearly half a million first-time voters eligible to vote in a country of just less than 10 million, this age group could prove decisive.

“What is very special about Tisza is that they have widespread support among young people,” says Mr. Vető. “We are talking about young people who grew up under Fidesz but are digitally active and see clearly things are better elsewhere.”

Vince Loky, a 23-year-old who was raised in Szentendre but studies in Budapest, wonders why Hungary, with its high sales taxes, lacks the modern rail and public transport systems found in other European cities, such as Vienna. To get to class, he takes a rundown train into the capital, a daily reminder of the gap.

“I would vote for this tree, if it means ousting Fidesz,” he says, indicating vegetation nearby as he waits for a train. “The only thing [Fidesz] didn't ruin is what they didn't touch.”

Mr. Loky studied international business economics in English, largely as an exit strategy should Fidesz remain in power. At home, money was tight. His mother, a biologist and teacher, struggled to make ends meet despite working full-time. He took a construction side job while in high school to relieve financial pressures.

His experience reflects broader pressures on the Hungarian economy. Since the pandemic, inflation has surged while wages lag behind Western Europe. Disputes with Brussels have led to the suspension of billions of euros in EU funding for Hungary, limiting investment. Public services have declined under tighter budgets and Hungarians across age groups have noted the decline.

“People don't want miracles, but normal life,” Mr. Magyar said at the rally in Szentendre. “They want disinfectant in the hospitals, teachers at the schools, and decent roads. The young shouldn't have to leave their country.”

Economic frustrations

Mr. Magyar has been tapping into a deep well of economic discontent. In 2024, he took over and rebranded the once-marginal Tisza party, turning it into a political force.

His reformist message has resonated with disillusioned voters across the political spectrum. Hungarians have grown frustrated with both the ruling Fidesz and a fragmented, ineffective opposition, according to analysts and lay people alike.

“When I hear [Mr. Magyar] speak, I tell myself, this is it. This is the guy who can win,” says Suzanne, a sociologist who only gave her first name. “Wherever he goes to campaign, he knows the problems of the local area and has solutions in mind. He has surrounded himself with good advisers.”

Mr. Magyar presents himself as a technocrat. He is credited with recruiting and fielding candidates based on merit, rather than party loyalty. And unlike previous opposition candidates, his conservative background might help him win over older voters, even those who voted for Fidesz in the past.

“My grandparents are willing to change their vote so my life gets better,” says Reka Vinko, who studied tourism and is frustrated by economic stagnation and lack of employment opportunities. She says her parents are not so accommodating: They flatly tell her to leave the country if she is so unhappy.

Accusations abound

Mr. Magyar has focused on the scandals stalking Fidesz to re-

inforce the momentum of his campaign. The latest to make waves are allegations, reported by The Washington Post, that Hungarian officials shared sensitive EU information with Russia, as well as claims that Hungarian intelligence services targeted Fidesz's political opposition.

But Mr. Magyar's own rise is tainted by controversy, too. He shot to fame in 2024 during the fallout from a controversial presidential pardon. Ultimately, both Hungary's president and the justice minister at the time resigned amid public outcry.

Mr. Magyar left Fidesz and loudly criticized party leadership – including the justice minister, who was his ex-wife – during the scandal. Critics in the Fidesz camp argue that this shows a betrayal of personal and political trust on Mr. Magyar's part; Fidesz billboards depict him as a “two-faced man.”

Being heard

Ms. Vinko says she is not entirely sold on Mr. Magyar. But she is still willing to give him a chance and vote accordingly.

Though her parents have always urged her to steer clear of politics to avoid trouble, she joined her friends at a rally for Mr. Orbán, hoping it might be one of his last. That impression was reinforced by loud booing at multiple campaign events for the prime minister, even in small towns that have in the past voted for Fidesz.

For Ms. Vinko, it comes down to feeling seen and heard. She chafes against the government's view of society that rewards child-bearing and leaves little room for women outside traditional roles.

“If you don't have a child, you don't count,” she says. “I don't want to have a child in a situation that is so uncertain. I'm really hoping [Mr. Magyar] wins. If it doesn't work out, I want to leave.”

■ *For the latest updates on Hungary's elections, please see our coverage on our app or [csmonitor.com](https://www.csmonitor.com).*

Some MAGA influencers are taking a shine to solar power

President Trump has shunned it, but political conservatives, including Newt Gingrich and Kellyanne Conway, say the movement should embrace it.

By **Scott Baldauf** / Staff writer

The solar industry became a target in the first year of President Donald Trump's second term, when his administration cut key federal tax credits, subsidies, and investments in solar power, as well as broader green technology initiatives.

The Republican president's skepticism toward low-carbon energy, rooted in a combination of economic, aesthetic, and ideological objections, is well-known. At the World Economic Forum held in January 2025, Mr. Trump boasted of terminating former Democratic President Joe Biden's “ridiculous” and “wasteful” Inflation Reduction Act – which, among other spending to support renewable energy, offered tax incentives to encourage solar power.

Yet as America's demand for electricity rises – expected to grow at a 2.8% compound annual growth rate over the next 15 years – some Republican influencers such as former House Speaker Newt

Gingrich and former Trump adviser Kellyanne Conway, who are still among the president's most ardent supporters, are encouraging him to adopt a more pragmatic approach to solar.

The reason is simple supply and demand, they say, though Mr. Gingrich mixes in a touch of nationalism. Failure to meet the electricity demands of industry would slow business growth, just when futuristic technologies such as artificial intelligence are starting to boom. To remain competitive with China in AI, he says, America needs to expand its electric power generation by using every energy source available.

“History tells us that energy scarcity is the biggest threat to the American economy,” Mr. Gingrich wrote in a recent opinion column in the right-leaning website, the Daily Caller.

“We need more of everything. Intentionally excluding vital energy sources, fuel-based or renewable, reduces supply and drives up prices. This harms families and businesses. This is not abstract economic theory. It is common sense.”

Solar grows, despite a political divide

Historically, America's power grid has always been a pragmatic concern, though people at opposite ends of the political spectrum often disagree on how to ensure Americans get the power they need.

The debate over climate change disrupted all that.

In 2016, America, under President Barack Obama, joined 192 other nations and the European Union in signing the Paris Agreement to substantially reduce carbon emissions by 2030. Americans were divided: Conservatives said the agreement would damage America's economy, while liberals cited the overwhelming scientific consensus that climate change is happening and is primarily caused by human activity. How and whether to use low- and zero-carbon energy sources such as wind and solar – moving away from fossil fuels – were at the heart of that partisan divide.

But today, even amid disagreements, after a decade and a half of expansion, solar power accounts for 8.5% of the U.S. electricity generation mix, up from 0.1% in 2010. That is still well behind fossil fuels, which make up more than half of the U.S. energy mix. Fossil fuels have a powerful lobbying presence, spending about \$150 million a year to advocate for oil, gas, and coal businesses. Even so, in 2024, wind and solar power together overtook coal for the first time in electricity production, with wind and solar at 17% and coal at 15%.

“I don't view energy as an ideological issue, but that's what it's been turned into,” says Eric D. Larson, a senior research scholar at the Andlinger Center for Energy and the Environment at Princeton University.

“I think that maybe a concern is that if demand is outstripping supply, prices will go up,” Professor Larson says. “And rising prices translate into votes, typically. But also, there is the recognition that if we want to stay ahead as a country at the cutting edge of technology, and AI is going to be a big part of that, we need power.”

A boon to “red-state America”?

At the moment, there is little evidence that prominent Republicans touting solar will influence President Trump to change his mind on solar energy. His 2025 tax-and-spending bill, which phased out solar subsidies, passed the House along party lines, 218-214. Those entrusted with implementing Mr. Trump's energy policies are led by Secretary of Energy Christopher Wright, the founder and former CEO of Liberty Energy, a major fracking service company. He has called solar panels “a parasite” that provides only intermit-

tent power. In a Feb. 17, 2026, panel discussion, Mr. Wright showed no signs of wavering.

“We got off track because of a wild misunderstanding, an exaggeration” about climate change, Mr. Wright said at a conference at the French Institute of International Relations in Paris. Climate change, he said, “is a real thing, but it has gotten so ridiculously out of whack that we have policies that have just driven up energy [prices, and] driven deindustrialization and made our countries geopolitically weaker.”

Even so, a small number of Republicans with influence in the White House are publicly advocating that President Trump adopt it as part of “America First” policy and give solar energy another chance.

Conservative podcaster Katie Miller – wife of Mr. Trump’s Homeland Security Advisor Stephen Miller – recently made the case for solar energy on social media. Ms. Miller, a former aide to Elon Musk, has been publicly promoting solar energy and has noted that her former boss’s company, Tesla, produces solar panels. She has stated she does not have a paid partnership with the clean energy groups she sometimes cites.

“Solar is now the dominant source of new U.S. power capacity and is on track to surpass coal in total installed capacity before the end of 2026,” she wrote. “70 GW of new solar capacity is scheduled to come online in 2026–2027 → a 49% increase in operating solar capacity from the end of 2025.”

Ms. Conway, a pollster and former Trump senior political counselor, conducted a February 2026 poll of 1,000 registered voters in Arizona, Florida, Indiana, Ohio, and Texas, on behalf of the pro-solar advocacy group, American Energy First. Her findings: “Solar power enjoys broad, durable, and increasingly intense public support,” including among Trump voters.

Eight in 10 respondents agreed when asked if “solar energy should be used in the U.S. to strengthen and increase our energy supply?” Three-quarters of self-identified Trump voters agreed.

More than two-thirds of the new solar plants built over the past five years are in states that the Republican Party carried in 2024, including Texas, Indiana, Florida, Ohio, Arizona, Utah, and Arkansas, according to a report by Wood Mackenzie on behalf of the Solar Energy Industries Association.

Artificial intelligence is booming, “and if you look at where they are building data centers, it’s in red-state America,” says Mark Fleming, president and CEO of Conservatives for Clean Energy in Raleigh, North Carolina. In the Carolinas, the combination of AI data centers and solar and wind farms has contributed to the property tax base. “It’s been a lifesaver for rural counties,” Mr. Fleming says, and that has brought more conservatives to the clean energy cause.

Neil Auerbach, founder and CEO of the Hudson Sustainable Group and senior adviser to the conservative-leaning American Conservation Coalition, says that ideologues on both sides of the aisle miss the point. America’s economic competitiveness depends on “abundant, affordable power today.”

“With the 2026 midterms approaching, the political stakes are clear. Voters will reward leaders who present credible solutions to keep the lights on and bills down,” Mr. Auerbach wrote in a recent opinion column. “Ideological purity, whether hostility toward fossil fuels or toward renewables, will not deliver affordable energy. An all of the above approach is not ideology; it is economic realism.”

Samantha Gross, director of the Energy Security and Climate Initiative at the Brookings Institution, says that whether you are worried about climate change or not, solar energy is a “one of the

easiest and fastest ways to get power. That is one reason why the administration shouldn’t be rolling its eyes at solar power.” ■

NEW YORK

With left-wing star power, could AOC seek White House?

New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, some observers say, could position herself as a young, charismatic underdog in a 2028 run for president.

By Aaron Short / Contributor

In the hours after the U.S. first struck Iran on Feb. 28, Democratic Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez put out a statement that was characteristically blunt.

“This war is unlawful. It is unnecessary. And it will be catastrophic,” she wrote.

Her full-throated denunciation stood in contrast to the carefully calibrated messaging from Democratic leaders in Washington, who sternly criticized President Donald Trump for failing to seek congressional authorization, but also condemned Iran as a “bad actor” with dangerous nuclear ambitions.

And it helps explain why Ms. Ocasio-Cortez is increasingly seen by many insiders as a serious contender for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2028. At a time when many Democratic voters are looking for leaders who will push back forcefully against President Trump, Ms. Ocasio-Cortez’s brand as an outspoken change agent may hold appeal. With fellow democratic socialist Sen. Bernie Sanders not likely to mount another White House run, there’s an opening in the left-wing, antiestablishment lane – if the former bartender from New York wants it.

The 2028 campaign won’t officially begin for another year or so. But not-so-subtle maneuvering is already taking place. Many Democratic White House hopefuls are visiting early primary states, peddling political memoirs, and raising money for local candidates.

Ms. Ocasio-Cortez has not engaged in such overt signaling and has generally deflected questions about her political future. But the New York congresswoman has positioned herself for a possible run. Last year, she joined Vermont’s Senator Sanders on a nationwide “Fighting Oligarchy Tour” that drew huge crowds. She also made some shrewd endorsements – including New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani, another democratic socialist who rose from obscurity to pull off one of the biggest political upsets in recent history.

It was a similar upset that catapulted Ms. Ocasio-Cortez onto the national stage in 2018, when she beat 10-term Democratic Rep. Joe Crowley, a member of the House leadership, to become the youngest woman ever elected to Congress. She quickly became a darling of the left – and a villain to the right – criticizing the status quo and pushing for progressive policies.

Now, she’s arrived at a kind of crossroads. Longtime observers and people in the four-term lawmaker’s orbit say she is carefully considering all her options. She could remain in the House and keep working her way up the seniority ladder, using her social media megaphone to steer her party. She could mount a primary challenge to New York Sen. Chuck Schumer, the Democratic leader

whose approval ratings have fallen as his party has languished in the minority. Or she could take an even bigger risk and run for president – offering herself as a young and charismatic underdog with fresh ideas and online savvy, at a time when the nation will be coming off its two oldest presidents ever.

“AOC conceivably fits in the Obama lane as an outsider,” says former New York Rep. Anthony Weiner. “The base is excited [by her]; she gives good speeches.” Paradoxically, he adds, she may benefit by being underestimated. “She’s seen as not having enough experience and is not being taken super seriously except by outsiders. Nowadays having less of a record is better than having more of a record.”

In national and early primary state surveys of whom Democratic voters would like to see as their next nominee, Ms. Ocasio-Cortez often lands in the top two or three. She is without question a polarizing figure, with policy preferences that put her to the left of the mainstream voter. But just as Mr. Trump moved the GOP in a more populist direction in 2016, the Democratic Party may be ripe for a takeover next year, particularly if frustrations with the war in Iran, rising health care and grocery costs, housing affordability, and Israel continue to build.

“We’ve seen progressives succeed at all levels across the country,” says John Paul Lupo, a Democratic political consultant. “She is the most electable progressive that we have, and she’d be foolish not to take a look at 2028.”

Playing the long game

Since coming to Washington as an inexperienced 29-year-old in 2018, Ms. Ocasio-Cortez has transformed from a brash newcomer to someone who seems to be playing the long game.

She antagonized some of her new House colleagues before she was even sworn in, joining youth climate activists to occupy Democratic Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s office that December. She partnered with Justice Democrats, a political action committee that recruits challengers to run against incumbents, including targeting newly selected House Democratic Caucus chairman Hakeem Jeffries.

Along with three other left-wing newcomers known as “The Squad,” Ms. Ocasio-Cortez amassed one of the largest social media followings on Capitol Hill – and used that platform to voice displeasure with border security legislation and Speaker Pelosi’s reluctance to launch impeachment proceedings against President Trump.

Ms. Pelosi publicly panned The Squad’s influence, while privately telling them to tone down their tweets if they ever wanted to accomplish anything.

Ms. Ocasio-Cortez seemed to heed the advice. Over the next six years, she became a skilled Washington insider, promoting progressive policies such as Medicare for All and the Green New Deal while also contributing campaign funds to moderate Democrats in swing districts.

She developed a friendly relationship with President Joe Biden, who adopted her agenda to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and expand health care access for millions of Americans. When other Democrats began calling on President Biden to suspend his reelection campaign after a disastrous debate performance in the summer of 2024, Ms. Ocasio-Cortez forcefully defended him.

More recently, she has staked out positions on issues from on-line gambling to AI and privacy to data centers that have drawn approving comments from conservatives.

Still, navigating the corridors of power on Capitol Hill doesn’t guarantee a successful leap to a presidential campaign. In February,

Ms. Ocasio-Cortez drew a slew of negative headlines after a high-profile stumble at an international security conference.

In her first major foreign policy address, she told an audience of global leaders in Munich, Germany, that income inequality has fueled the growth of far-right populism, urging Europe’s left and center-left communities to unite against it.

But when asked about other topics, her answers were less assured. She called the Transatlantic Partnership the Trans-Pacific Partnership, said Venezuela was below the equator, and paused for an excruciatingly long time when asked how the United States should respond if China invaded Taiwan. The criticism was so scathing that the congresswoman was forced to respond with a phone call to *The New York Times*.

To some, it was evidence of the greater scrutiny and higher standards that female candidates often encounter compared with male rivals.

“AOC has to avoid the ambition trap. Women of politics, particularly women of color, get seen as being impatient,” says Christian Amato, a campaign strategist from the Bronx. At the same time, he adds, “She has one of the clearest defined arcs to grow out of any candidate.”

The Senate option

In the wake of the Democrats’ 2024 electoral losses – when the party belatedly pushed its 81-year-old president out of the race, only to lose the White House to Mr. Trump and be shut out of power on Capitol Hill – generational tensions have continued to grow.

That winter, Ms. Ocasio-Cortez mounted a bid for ranking member of the House Oversight Committee, but lost out to eight-term Virginia Rep. Gerry Connolly, who died six months later. She declined to seek the position a second time, telling reporters “the underlying dynamics in the caucus have not shifted with respect to seniority as much as I think would be necessary.”

Since then, the clamor from Democratic voters for a new generation of leaders has only gotten louder. A number of younger candidates are challenging veteran lawmakers in primaries.

Much of the base’s ire has been directed toward New York Sen. Chuck Schumer, whose popularity has dwindled to its lowest level in 25 years. Last November, after eight Democratic senators voted with Republicans to end the longest government shutdown in history without securing any real policy concessions, several House Democrats called for his removal as minority leader.

Ms. Ocasio-Cortez blasted the decision to end the shutdown, but sidestepped questions about Mr. Schumer. Asked whether she would consider running for his seat when it comes up in 2028, she said only, “That is years from now.”

Still, some Democratic insiders see it as a strong possibility. Mr. Amato says Ms. Ocasio-Cortez has been building authority on a range of issues including civil liberties, executive overreach, and tech abuses. If she decides to challenge Mr. Schumer in a primary, he says, she will be well positioned to do so.

“Her behavior suggests, ‘I don’t want the seat if it’s handed down,’” he says. “She wants optimal conditions that make a different kind of leadership necessary.”

Mr. Schumer has not yet said whether he plans to run for reelection. But many speculate he will, especially if Democrats take control of the Senate in 2026.

Still, the minority leader has been losing support for much of the past year. Only 27% of statewide voters think he is doing an excellent or good job in office, according to a February Marist Poll. Ms.

Ocasio-Cortez topped him 48% to 34% in a head-to-head matchup among New York City voters surveyed by the Honan Strategy Group in December.

Bradley Honan, the New York pollster who conducted the survey, says Ms. Ocasio-Cortez would be a formidable Senate candidate. But he believes her ambitions run higher.

“The leadership role she’s played in the party, holding rallies with huge turnout at a time when Democrats are feeling disaffected. ... I think she is looking past the U.S. Senate race – which is hers to lose – and very seriously considering a presidential bid,” he says.

Then there’s the Mamdani effect. The splashy electoral success of Mayor Mamdani, on the heels of two grassroots-powered presidential runs by Senator Sanders, may give Ms. Ocasio-Cortez a boost in scaling up a campaign, tapping into a network of consultants and workers.

Gustavo Gordillo, co-chair of the New York City Democratic Socialists of America, said he is hearing “a lot of excitement” among his political organization’s members for another democratic socialist candidate for president.

“Bernie’s campaign was so helpful for working people in this country, even though he didn’t win,” he says. “I think that we’re hungry for another bite at the apple.” ■

BERLIN

Iran campaign reveals US dependency on Europe

The war in Iran is showing that Europe has more leverage over the United States than its leaders had thought. But can they use it?

By Mark Sappenfield / Staff writer

Throughout most of Donald Trump’s second term as president of the United States, Europe’s leaders have seemed bullied, belittled, and marginalized.

Then came the Iran war.

For the first time since Mr. Trump returned to office, Europe is proving essential to the president’s interests. Without access to European bases, the war in Iran would be orders of magnitude more difficult, if not impossible. Meanwhile, an outburst at a March 26 White House Cabinet meeting indicated just how bitterly Mr. Trump wants Europe to do more to join the fight.

“We are very disappointed with NATO because NATO has done absolutely nothing,” he said.

For once, it appears Europe has the leverage. And this comes only months after Europe stood up to Mr. Trump on his claims to Greenland, forcing the president to back down.

Europe, it seems, has arrived at a moment when it can at least somewhat readjust the balance of power.

On one hand, the Trump administration has likely realized that Europe is vital to its security interests, and that acting alone has consequences when the road turns rough.

Yet Europe’s unwillingness to do more to capitalize on the situation speaks to the core challenges facing modern Europe: Leaders seem to be scared of what Mr. Trump might do in return, and

therefore too divided to settle on a clear course of action.

This, ironically, is one reason Mr. Trump has been so dismissive of Europe. While he has been able to centralize significant power, allowing him wide scope for decisive action, Europe remains a comparatively fractious collection of nations more comfortable with incremental steps.

But if Iran shows one thing that has changed, it is that Europe is slowly growing a thicker skin. Leaders are still trying to work with Mr. Trump, hoping they can keep their historical ties to the U.S. intact. But experts say they are no longer terrified by every statement and social media post.

“Europe has realized a lot of these threats are empty,” says Matthias Matthijs, senior fellow for Europe at the Council on Foreign Relations. “There is a little more shrug of the shoulders. In 2025, there was immediate panic.”

Iran has been an example of how this new balancing act plays out.

European leaders seem convinced that the joint U.S.-Israeli campaign has virtually no chance of overthrowing the Iranian regime. It is casting the region and energy markets into chaos for no real purpose, they argue. Not only that, it is widely unpopular.

A poll by German TV station ARD found that 58% of respondents said the war was not justified, with 75% worried that it will spread to other countries. Trust in the U.S. fell to 15%, the lowest level in two decades. Polls around Europe show similar results.

Leaders are avoiding appearing connected to the war. But it affects them and is of great importance to Mr. Trump. The answer has been to distance themselves from the war but let the United States use their European bases. The U.S. is running various operations from England, France, Italy, Greece, Portugal, and Germany.

Ramstein Air Base in Germany is an example of how crucial European bases are to the operation. Many of the American military’s regional information technology-based operations are run from Ramstein, including artificial intelligence activities. It is a hub for targeting control, says Ulrich Kühn, an analyst for the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy in Hamburg, Germany.

In recent years, he adds, “the base has even increased in importance when conducting a war in the Middle East.”

Several countries have also sought to offer help – under specific conditions. This includes the potential deployment of minesweepers to the Strait of Hormuz once hostilities are over.

Apart from Spain, which refused to allow its bases to be used for the war, most European countries have conspicuously avoided extremes. They have not openly condemned the U.S., nor have they asked for concessions for the use of their bases.

One great concern is Mr. Trump’s unpredictable nature, in particular on Ukraine. He has shown only lukewarm support for that war, and some worry that upsetting him could lead him to act on threats of backing out or abandoning Europe.

“They’re afraid that if they push the envelope, it will end up a self-fulfilling prophecy when he does those things,” says Dr. Kühn.

But as a practical matter, Europe isn’t united enough to use leverage the way Mr. Trump does, he adds. “That’s not how Europe operates.”

For now, Europe seems to mostly hoping the lessons of the Iran war might sink in.

“It’s the first time [the members of the Trump administration] genuinely realize they need Europe,” says Dr. Matthijs. “There’s something to be said for building coalitions.” ■

ICE is expanding detention. Here's why it wants more beds.

The agency is buying warehouses around the U.S. to hold detainees. Some communities are pushing back.

By Sarah Matusek and Jingnan Peng / Staff writers

With some 68,000 immigrants in detention – as of February – and a goal of making space for up to 92,600 by this fall, Immigration and Customs Enforcement is roiling communities as it snaps up warehouses to hold those it hopes to deport.

After record-high illegal border crossings under the Biden administration, President Donald Trump ordered a whole-of-government crackdown on illegal immigration. His administration has also moved to end deportation protections for many immigrants lawfully here. Congress last year gave ICE a \$45 billion check to expand detention and help fulfill Mr. Trump's mass deportation goals, as arrests began to surge in the interior.

ICE says detention isn't punitive, but ensures immigrants show up on their court dates and are already in hand when a judge orders deportation. Meanwhile, the Trump administration is broadly interpreting the reasons for mandatory detention and urging immigration judges to deny immigrants bond.

As ICE buys warehouses that the agency says would hold 1,000 to 10,000 beds each, some communities are pushing back. Towns where new ICE sites could crop up are grappling with infrastructure and humanitarian concerns.

Critics also say the government uses harsh detention conditions to coerce "self-deportation," and they raise concerns about access to medical care and legal counsel. DHS has denied such claims. Meanwhile, 13 people have died in ICE custody so far this year, reports analyst Austin Kocher, a professor at Syracuse University. (ICE did not respond to several questions sent by the Monitor.)

Newly confirmed Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin will need to navigate ICE's existing plans.

Q: Why is ICE expanding its detention efforts?

The agency says it wants to "streamline" the deportation process and hold more people in fewer detention centers.

ICE sees detention as a way to guarantee deportations of those ordered to leave, as it's easier to deport people from custody than to search for them. Despite the administration's claims that it targets "the worst of the worst," most ICE detainees have not been convicted of crimes. That said, civil immigration violations are enough to deport someone without a criminal history.

ICE has reportedly bought at least 11 warehouses around the country. Separately, ICE has also canceled a dozen planned warehouse purchases, nearly all following local opposition, according to Project Salt Box, a website tracking the purchases through public records. The agency has said its goal is buying 24 "non-traditional facilities."

Q: How have communities responded to new proposed detention sites?

Reactions have been mixed. After local backlash, warehouse purchases have slowed significantly in recent weeks, says Michael Wriston, a former intelligence analyst and head of Project Salt Box.

From New Hampshire to Mississippi, elected officials and residents have voiced alarm over the facilities' potential impacts on local resources and their suitability for human habitation. They say the federal government hasn't consulted with them. Still, states and localities generally have little power to stop the federal government from buying up properties.

In Social Circle, Georgia, a city of 5,000, ICE purchased a warehouse where it plans to hold at least 7,500 detainees with 2,000 staff members. Once operational, the site will exceed the city's entire sewage capacity and overwhelm local emergency resources, says City Manager Eric Taylor.

"I'm extremely worried," says Mr. Taylor, adding that he locked a water meter at the facility in February to prevent water from being turned on. "[DHS officials] don't seem to have any plans for how they're going to address [the facility's impact]."

Mr. Taylor says the only time he heard from Homeland Security regarding the warehouse was in mid-February, weeks after the \$129 million purchase was made. During the meeting, he says, a federal official presented a sewage analysis that erroneously included an out-of-county treatment plant under Social Circle's sewage system. Mr. Taylor says he has since reached out to DHS multiple times but hasn't heard back.

In Bradford County, Florida, prisons are already a major source of employment, so county officials see a new ICE facility as a potential economic boost. County commissioners voted in January to refine a proposal to turn a vacant, county-owned warehouse into a facility holding at least 1,000 detainees for ICE. The facility would be run by Sabot Consulting, which the county sheriff says reached out to him with the proposal. The company did not respond to a request for comment.

Bradford County Sheriff Gordon Smith says he "totally supports" the idea. In his county of roughly 30,000, the project would create hundreds of "living-wage jobs," he says, and bring infrastructure upgrades to the warehouse that the county can't afford itself.

"If we don't do something to bring more economic development to our community, we're going to be in a real crisis," the sheriff says.

Q: How long can ICE detain immigrants in these centers?

"The courts have said that you cannot detain people forever," says Kathleen Bush-Joseph, a lawyer at the Migration Policy Institute. However, "sometimes people can languish in detention for long periods of time."

In 2001, the Supreme Court ruled that ICE can't indefinitely detain people who have final deportation orders. That case said they shouldn't be held for more than six months if it appeared unlikely they would be deported. By contrast, courts haven't set detention limits for people still awaiting outcomes in their immigration cases.

How long people are in detention can depend on a variety of factors. For those with cases still in immigration court, choosing to fight on and appeal can extend their stay.

Detention is "the cornerstone of the deportation process," says Scott Mechkowski, a former deputy field office director at ICE, but it costs money. "Every day that you're in custody, you're costing taxpayers X amount of money."

As much as immigrants want to get out of ICE detention, it's

not easy. They are not entitled to lawyers at the government's expense. Still, immigrant detainees have been filing challenges to their detention in high numbers – on average, more than 200 a day, ProPublica reported in February.

Other logistical and even diplomatic barriers can block deportation and prolong detention. For example, some countries don't cooperate in accepting their citizens.

Another wrinkle: Courts have both stymied and sped up federal attempts to bypass deportation roadblocks, with mixed rulings on plans such as third-country deportations.

Q: What about children? How long can ICE detain them?

Whether a child is with a guardian matters. Under U.S. law, DHS generally can't detain unaccompanied minors past 72 hours. By then, those children must be transferred to the Department of Health and Human Services. That agency housed on average 2,348 unaccompanied children in February.

Families, on the other hand, can be held in custody longer. Courts have interpreted a decades-old settlement agreement in a way that generally requires ICE to hold family groups including minors no longer than 20 days.

At the Dilley detention center in Texas, families with children have endured lockdowns, virus outbreaks, and worms in food, according to complaints. It is not clear yet whether any of the new facilities will hold families.

Over 900 children have been held beyond 20 days as of January, reports NBC News, citing data from court-appointed monitors.

The Trump administration, it seems, "is not taking those rules very seriously," says Scott Shuchart, a former assistant director for regulatory affairs and policy at ICE. "It does seem like they're detaining people, family groups, longer term." ■

REPORTERS ON THE JOB

HULL, MASSACHUSETTS



Melanie Stetson Freeman

The harbormaster of my neighboring town is a jolly, outgoing fellow. As a Monitor photographer, I was taking pictures for a story on beaches reopening for shellfishing after 100 years. His first words when I started posing him for his close-up: "I hate having my photo taken." If I had a nickel for every time a subject has told me that!

"Don't worry, this won't hurt a bit!" I said as I posed him on nearby piers and tried *not* to fall in. All along, I was chatting him up about my job, his job, the weather – anything to take his mind off my camera. He relaxed and turned out to be very photogenic. Often, the best photos happen when people forget they're being photographed. ■

CHEYENNE, WYOMING



Sarah Matusek

Wyoming wind is no joke – I felt the wrath of 90-mph gusts driving from Denver to Cheyenne. I passed tipped-over semitrucks, beached like whales. But I drove on, eager to catch a public meeting about Wyoming's new cryptocurrency. As the wind tried to nudge me out of my lane, I gripped the wheel and prayed. Two hours later, grit hit my eyes as I exited

the car and struggled to heave open the Capitol door. Arriving just in time, I found plenty of open seats: Besides officials, I was the sole attendee. I only wish I'd had time to fix my hair. ■

KATHMANDU, NEPAL



Aakash Hassan

Nepal's early March general elections were its most charged to date, gripping everything from Kathmandu to dusty villages after last year's youth-led uprising toppled the government. Cars were draped in party flags, loudspeakers blared, and the streets buzzed with political chatter. It felt like nothing else mattered.

Then, three days before voting, the mood broke.

Streets were drenched in color, water balloons flew from balconies, and strangers smeared powder across each other's faces. When I tried to ask a man about the impending vote, he pressed a pigmented finger to my lips. "Today, we don't think about anything – not even the election," he shouted over the cacophony. "Today is Holi."

The holiday was a vivid reminder that what binds a society often lies beyond its divisions. ■

AL QURAYYAT, SAUDI ARABIA



Taylor Luck

I have traveled from Jordan to Saudi Arabia a dozen times – by plane. But with flights canceled due to Iranian drones and missiles targeting Amman and Riyadh, I am taking a 15-hour taxi ride into the heart of this giant Gulf state. My goal? To report on how the Iran war is changing the way Saudis view themselves and their place in the region. I'll speak to average Saudis, officials, and business owners who are suddenly looking at a less certain future and a looming energy crisis.

My packing list: camera, press vest, first aid kit, a thermos of coffee, and a half dozen podcasts. As I recline in my seat, watching the desert go by, the open road feels calmer than the unfriendly skies. ■

PEOPLE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

SOUTH KORDOFAN, SUDAN

Children of war call Our Father's Cleft home

A brutal conflict is forcing many young Sudanese to starve, fight as soldiers, or toil in mines. At a mountain orphanage, children find care and community.

By Sophie Neiman / Contributor

In a dusty courtyard between sepia-colored mountain slopes, bright-eyed children in gray uniforms sing about respecting God and their elders. Their voices are high and clear, but the littlest struggle to clap along in time.

This is Our Father's Cleft, a school and children's home in the Nuba Mountains, a vast range spanning some 30,000 square miles in the borderland area between the conflict-racked countries of Sudan and South Sudan. Large numbers of children began arriving at Our Father's Cleft after Sudan's third civil war erupted in April 2023 – a testament to how many families have been torn apart as the fighting has spawned the worst humanitarian crisis in the world.

Director Ezekiel Ayub, who applauds the singers on this hot February day, works with his staff to provide shelter, education,

and care to the children. Operating for more than a decade, Our Father's Cleft is the only official orphanage in these mountains.

"They are missing the love of their parents," Mr. Ayub says of his charges, some as young as about age 5. But, after time at Our Father's Cleft, "they feel like they are part of the community."

Teaching with empathy

Our Father's Cleft is home to 180 children and young adults and is educating some 300 more. Mr. Ayub knows firsthand what these children have endured. He spent his boyhood hiding in the caves of the Nuba Mountains during Sudan's second civil war, which ran from 1983 to 2005. His family rarely had enough food to eat, and Mr. Ayub watched as other children around him grew sick and died.

He eventually escaped to Port Sudan, where he went to school, then returned to the Nuba Mountains and found the area devastated by conflict. He began working as a teacher in informal classrooms. "I wasn't a good teacher," he says modestly, "but at least I tried."

Neighboring South Sudan won its independence in 2011, causing new conflict to erupt in the Nuba Mountains. Nuba communities sympathetic to the southern cause found themselves marooned in the north. The Sudanese Armed Forces rained bombs on the territory in an effort to stamp out another rebellion.

Mr. Ayub continued working. Drawing on his childhood experiences helped him to empathize with his pupils. The name Our Father's Cleft comes from the mountain caves where he and his family used to hide.

Filmmaker Wil Davies has seen the impact of Mr. Ayub's work firsthand. On a trip to Sudan last year, Mr. Davies sought out positive stories amid reports of violence and death. Everyone kept mentioning Mr. Ayub.

"There's this man that just exudes calmness, that welcomes [children] into his school," Mr. Davies says of the orphanage director. "He just offers something that so many children haven't had over their short lifetimes."

"They give me joy"

The war in Sudan is staggering in its scale. While estimates vary, the former U.S. envoy for Sudan suggested last summer that more than 400,000 have died. According to the International Rescue Committee, some 8.8 million people have been internally displaced.

Sometimes, Mr. Ayub travels to crowded displacement camps in the Nuba Mountains, where he picks up vulnerable children and takes them to Our Father's Cleft. Other times, relatives bring children to Mr. Ayub, or young people walk there alone from as far as Darfur, some 300 miles away.

Among the children is 15-year-old Ahmed, identified by only his first name for his safety. The boy was injured in the town of Al Hadra in March 2024, when the Sudanese Armed Forces bombed his school.

The attack killed about a dozen people and injured some 45 others. Ahmed lost an arm in the assault, and shrapnel is still embedded in his stomach.

His mother had died in a separate bombing in Khartoum, Sudan's capital, earlier that year. At home with his father, there was never enough for Ahmed to eat, and health care services were limited.

Almost a year after the bombing, Ahmed's father brought him to Our Father's Cleft. Now, Ahmed is a keen mathematics student and hopes to become a doctor. "I want to treat people – to help people as they have already helped me," he says.

Young people aided by Our Father's Cleft often pay it forward.

Mujaiah Yusef used to live and study here after her parents died. Now, she looks after the children in the girls dormitory at the orphanage.

Under the watchful eyes of Ms. Yusef, the girls study, sitting together on bunk beds with red and yellow sheets, while other children play volleyball on a sandy field outside.

"They give me joy and hope," Ms. Yusef says.

"They will bring peace"

Mr. Ayub walks by a garden where the children sometimes work, past concrete classrooms and dorms. He gestures to an empty bit of shrubland where he would like to construct more buildings so that greater numbers of children can come to learn and live.

Our Father's Cleft can help only a fraction of the children in need in the Nuba Mountains. "There are many others who are suffering," Mr. Ayub says.

Lift Up the Vulnerable, a Christian anti-trafficking organization, financially supports the school and the children's home.

"It's either starvation or slavery," Audrey Moore, CEO of Lift Up the Vulnerable, says of children left without help in Sudan.

Both the Sudanese Armed Forces and its rivals, the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, are accused of recruiting child soldiers, while other young people are forced to work in the gold mines that help fund the war. Some 8 million children are out of school as a result of the conflict, according to Save the Children. In addition, 3 million children under age 5 are malnourished, UNICEF says.

But just as Ahmed plans to one day become a doctor, and Ms. Yusef returned to Our Father's Cleft to help care for the girls there, Mr. Ayub hopes that the children at the orphanage will help all of Sudan someday.

"If they can study, they will transform their communities; they will be change-makers," he says. "They will bring peace. They will end the war."

■ Reporting for this article was supported by the Pulitzer Center.

EDITORIALS

The big lift in intelligence from AI

Concerns about the impact of artificial intelligence on jobs has vacillated between two four-letter words: fear and hype. As a result, about two-thirds of Americans believe AI will lead to fewer jobs, while the overpromising of AI's potential has helped lead to a similar proportion of people not using AI much or at all in their jobs.

By last year, however, surveys of AI's actual impact in the workplace had started to roll in. Many indicate a move toward enhancing the application of reason, analytical judgment, and other skills – and redefining intelligence to levels beyond the limits of a machine or the brain.

One survey in the New York-northern New Jersey area found that a large share of businesses using AI are retraining workers to use the technology with no significant reductions in employment. Another study by three universities found that employees who were retrained to use AI earn substantially more. Meanwhile, research by Morgan Stanley found AI will not only augment human capabilities but could come with an unprecedented demand for upskilling.

Upskilling means elevating the capabilities of workers beyond what they might believe is their level of intelligence. The nature of work in the AI era will require an expansion of qualities, such as curiosity, intuition, and humility. “The skill that is going to be rewarded most in the short run is imagination in finding creative ways to use AI,” Rajeev Rajan of Atlassian, a software firm, told *The Economist*.

World thinkers have often tried to break the belief that intelligence is human-centric. The founder of the Monitor, Mary Baker Eddy, wrote that discernment requires a capacity for spiritual understanding beyond the physical senses. “Such intuitions reveal whatever constitutes and perpetuates harmony, enabling one to do good, but not evil,” she stated in *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*.

Three Dutch academics, writing in the journal *Frontiers in Artificial Intelligence*, cite a need to reconceptualize intelligence in “its many possible forms and combinations.” Human intelligence is not “the golden standard.”

AI might catch up with human intelligence, they suggested, but we should not dwell on whether “AI will outsmart us, take our jobs, or how to endow it with all kinds of human abilities.”

Rather, humans can expand their capacity for judgment to better supervise the growth of AI. ■

Ban teens from social media? Ask first.

When the ruling party in Britain proposed last year that the voting age be lowered to 16, one TV station went out and asked 16- and 17-year-olds what they thought of the idea. Of 500 surveyed, a bare 51% supported it. Only 18% said they would definitely vote.

The Labour Party might have learned a lesson. To nurture maturity in teens, one must respect what maturity they already have – in how they view their own potential and problems. Love means listening first, and then legislating.

This year, as pressure builds worldwide to ban teen use of social media, the U.K. government has commissioned a pilot test before making a power slap against tech giants such as Meta, Google, or TikTok. In a research trial in coming months, a few hundred persons ages 13 to 17 will voluntarily be banned from social media in their home for six weeks to measure the impact on their well-being and safety. The research, led by a team at the University of Cambridge and Bradford Institute for Health Research, exemplifies a sensitivity to the nuances of both the harm and benefits of online content.

“We can act at pace on the results of the consultation on young people and social media,” stated U.K. Technology Secretary Liz Kendall.

Focusing only on evil aspects of online content might make lawmakers – as well as court judges – miss the good, such as advances in safe, supportive social media that might drive off the bad. Teens themselves can give advice on how to sift the chaff from the wheat.

A blanket ban might end up not improving children’s safety and well-being. Or teens could devise methods to skirt a ban. Working with them – as many parents have learned – can reduce social media’s harms while enhancing mental growth in dealing with such challenges.

In the United States, a Pew Research Center survey last year found 45% of teens agree that they spend too much time on social media, while a majority says it helps in making connections and expressing their creativity. A minority 20% says it hurts their mental health or grades.

Thousands of lawsuits in the United States are now testing courts in deciding if tech companies should be held responsible for such harms. In two separate cases in March, verdicts held social media companies accountable for harm to young users.

Solutions might lie in simply giving an ear to teens, both individually and societywide. Close attention to their fears and aims can also spark self-regulation. ■

When spring bursts forth with renewal

Politics in Washington might be downbeat and divided, but nothing unites the U.S. capital – and many thousands of tourists – in a spirit of optimism and anticipation like the spring blossoms of the city’s iconic cherry trees.

“PEAK BLOOM! PEAK BLOOM! PEAK BLOOM! It’s official!” the National Park Service gleefully announced on March 26.

The news confirmed that the last weekend of March would be the best time to visit the pink-hued Tidal Basin and National Mall. Each weekend day saw thousands of visitors strolling or sitting in conversation and contemplation along the pathways lined with more than 3,000 Japanese cherry trees given as a gift by the city of Tokyo in 1912.

“The first cherry trees helped crystallize an image of what Washington could look like,” Thomas Luebke, secretary of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, said on the centenary of the gift that helped transform and soften the landscape of the United States’ seat of power.

For students of history and culture, the trees’ delicate flowers and gnarled trunks speak to the enduring soft power of global goodwill, culture, and faith in a better future to overcome division, including wartime enmity and destruction. After Japan bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941, the cherry trees in Washington were occasionally vandalized. But in 1952, as the U.S. shepherded post-World War II reconstruction, budwood from the Washington trees was transferred to Tokyo to restore the damaged original parent grove. This year, an additional 250 cherry trees sent by Japan to commemorate the 250th anniversary of U.S. independence will be planted in Washington.

Family, friends, and fresh beginnings

Beyond political gestures, cherry blossom celebrations point to near-universal interpretations of springtime as a season of renewal and fresh beginnings. The traditional Japanese practice of *hanami* – gathering with family and friends to view the blossoms, share conversation, and enjoy leisurely picnics – has spread around the U.S. as well as to world capitals such as London, Paris, and Stockholm.

In an international context that feels fragile or fractured, and alongside increasing isolation especially among urban populations, this spring tradition spreads a priceless joy and connection. The *Washington Post* last year highlighted a couple who have held a sunrise picnic during cherry blossom time for more than 25 years – and are now regularly recognized and greeted by passersby.

As Japanese poet Kobayashi Issa expressed in a classic haiku some 200 years ago:

*Under the cherry blossoms
strangers are not
really strangers*

THE HOME FORUM

Hope in the soil and stones

A lone volunteer's effort to save monarch butterflies creates a caring community, one rock and seed packet at a time.

Down the street a ways, there is a parking strip by a soccer field. A half-block long and about 2 feet wide, a wedge of life bounded by concrete, it's meticulously planted in Things Monarch Butterflies Like. You could be forgiven for not recognizing the theme if it were not for the numerous educational signs. The smooth rocks carefully painted with genus and species names. The poster about the plight of monarch butterflies, and what can be done for them. And, the crowning touch, a mounted box, like a Little Free Library, hung with packets of milkweed seeds instead of books.

This is the skinny rectangular work of someone who cares.

I certainly appreciated the effort. I figured it was mainly educational. There's a grade school right there, and I visualized a sweet teacher trying to get her students involved. Also, I understood the fundamentals: Monarch butterflies, which are in some trouble these days like other species, are very specific about where they like to lay their eggs – on milkweed, pretty much to exclusion. But we've lost vast acreages of milkweed to profitable crops such as corn and soybeans, and the monarchs appear on the verge of crashing.

The idea of planting milkweed in parking strips and alleyways and front yards and tucked here and there in our gardens is meant to address this devastation in the heartland and elsewhere.

Stretches of milkweed in the Midwest might be easier for an army of monarchs to find, but the monarchs will find it where it exists. Milkweed is their field of dreams. And here someone, clearly, is building it. Will they come?

If I ever doubted that, I did no longer after I planted my first asparagus bed. Forty years ago, it might have been the only stand of asparagus for miles around. Still, within weeks of the emergence of the first spears, a fraternity of asparagus beetles was partying away on the crop.

Somehow, the chemical signature of our 4-inch-high asparagus spears was telegraphed to the greater asparagus beetle community, whose entire local population came by for spring break. Asparagus beetles are asparagus savants. Insects, in general, are savants, and that includes the monarchs.

Still, I had my doubts about this little patch of milkweed next to the soccer field. Our valley is not a major monarch flyway. The likelihood of some gorgeous little orange flapper finding its way to a milkweed plant here, no matter the sincerity of the gardener, seemed low.

Then one day, I met the gardener. I caught Ida in the act of replenishing the little free seed library. As it turns out, she had indeed taught art, and her children had attended that school. She'd gotten permission to plant that strip with native plants years ago, but only more recently discovered there had been some success attracting the odd monarch to local patches. And that tilted the whole little landscape toward the butterflies. But if, as one of the painted stones laments, there's been a 99% reduction in monarchs in the past 30 years, it would be pretty easy to assume there's not much one person can do about it. It's pretty easy to mourn, and move on.

Unless you're Ida.

This one person hand-harvested 17 pounds of milkweed seeds last year, from a farm down south. She founded a second butterfly oasis on city property across town and tends both patches. She gives talks to schools and interested groups, fosters caterpillars, and paints butterflies on stones to give away or sell. It's an actual seed fund: She purchases nectar flower seed in bulk. And almost every day, she rises well before dawn to fill and label tiny seed packets. This is a full-time job. Clearly, the woman is not normal. Three hours a day just on seed packets to replenish two little libraries?

"I can barely keep up," she says. Word's getting around, and so are those seeds. In the process of creating habitat, she is fostering a community of people who care. Maybe there's not much we can do, but we can always do something. I can't help but smile when I see Ida's rollicking streetside ribbon of milkweed, scabiosas, coneflowers, blazing stars, and more.

This is art. This is a shrine. This is hope in the soil and stones.

It's a lot of work for a volunteer, but Ida is paid in butterflies. Not many, not yet, but some, and more on the way. Around here, that's one fine currency.

– Murr Brewster

GARDENING TIPS TO SUPPORT MONARCHS

PLANT

Milkweed: Native to your area (avoid tropical milkweed) to support breeding.

Fall nectar: Native to your area (goldenrod, aster, joe-pye weed, and sunflower are a few) to provide energy for the flight to Mexico.

AVOID

Pesticides and herbicides.

Butterfly bush (buddleia): It attracts adult monarchs but doesn't supply the right nutrients, causing a decline in future generations.

Swallowwort (Cynanchum): Avoid black and pale varieties. Dig up the entire root crown; broken roots can resprout. Do not compost.

ART IN THE NATURAL WORLD

In our hurried lives, we often don't look closely at the world around us. During photo shoots, I search for close-up shots in addition to portraits and scene setters. Sometimes, these unusual shots are a mystery, and surprise the viewer when they realize exactly what they're seeing. Consider this extreme macro image of a monarch butterfly wing – the colors, lines, and patterns create an abstract composition. I've spent my career looking at the world and its treasures through my camera lens.

I think Mother Nature is our greatest artist.

– Melanie Stetson Freeman

A CHRISTIAN SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE

'Cause me to hear ...'

I've always loved the book of Psalms in the Bible. Many of the verses in these psalms, these sacred prayers, are instructional, inspirational, and comforting. Authentic in voice and relatable in tone, they are just as accessible today as when they were first sung. And there's great value in letting these prayers guide us in our own prayers to God, as well as in how to think about the world and our place in it.

One such psalm relates to how God, Spirit – one of seven biblically based synonyms for God – guides our steps and cares for us. The following passage captures this idea beautifully: "Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk" (Psalms 143:8).

When we read or pray with this memorable verse, we are calling on God directly, specifically, and with expectancy of being heard and answered. It is an engaged prayer of obedience. We're asking God to cause us to hear – to be sure we hear – what? His lovingkindness.

What a precious thing to ask to hear. Who among us doesn't want to have a clearer, more consistent sense of the ever-present love and tender care God bestows on all?

"In Thee do I trust." Trusting God enables us to expect to hear – and to hear – the Christ, which is God's timeless message of lovingkindness. And not only in the morning, but all day and all night, too! It's natural for us to trust God, our infinitely good divine Parent.

The psalm continues with another request: "Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk." Nurturing a purer, more trusting sense of God's presence and lovingkindness enables us to hear what direction we should take or what decision we should make.

Mary Baker Eddy, who founded The Christian Science Monitor, wrote in her textbook, "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures," "Having no other gods, turning to no other but the one perfect Mind to guide him, man is the likeness of God, pure and eternal, having that Mind which was also in Christ" (p. 467). Along with Spirit, Mind is another Bible-based synonym for God, who created us in His spiritual image. We reflect His wisdom, goodness, and love. When we yield to divine Spirit, divine Mind,

we find that God is always guiding us, and that we are innately capable of following His leading.

At one point, several years ago, I was particularly praying with this verse, and what most stood out to me was the first part of it: "Cause me to hear." If there is cause, there is naturally effect. Because God is All-in-all and all good, as Christian Science teaches, we can expect to hear God answer us when we pray to better understand His nature.

All day, I found myself turning to God in prayer with these profound words in my thought. Small decision to make? "Cause me to hear." Big decision to make? "Cause me to hear." And then I would listen to hear God's voice and feel His lovingkindness. The more I prayed with this verse and brought it into my day, the more inspired I felt. A sense of peace and trusting quiet were my constant companions that day.

So, as we all go about our days and weeks and lives, we can turn to God, our ever-present guide. Expecting an answer, we will hear, and can obey!

– Jennifer McLaughlin

BOOKS

The evolution of Lincoln's immigration ideals

The immigration debate stirred tensions in America in the 1800s, too. How one historian assesses the former president's legacy.

By Sarah Matussek / Staff writer

Abraham Lincoln faced a nation divided, and not just by the Civil War. A national battle over immigration had already raged for decades as millions of Europeans arrived.

The Republican president might be best known for his emancipation mission, but he also saw immigration as key to keeping the country afloat with so many men off at war. Hundreds of thousands of German, Irish, and other foreign-born soldiers also helped the Union Army win.

Still, Lincoln's immigration record is mixed. He signed legislation in 1862 that limited Chinese labor. But Lincoln also championed a law that reduced barriers to immigration – the last such law for a century. His Homestead Act offered land out West to U.S. citizens and future citizens as well – though at the cost of more Native American displacement.

More broadly, the president believed that anyone with talent, ambition, and a willingness to work "had the right to go as far as the American experiment allowed you to go," says Harold Holzer, author of "Brought Forth on This Continent: Abraham Lincoln and American Immigration."

As the American debate over who belongs here continues to roil, the Monitor explored Lincoln's immigration legacy with Mr. Holzer, the director of the Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute at Hunter College and Manhattan's new borough historian. Our conversation was edited for clarity and length.

Q: How did the Lincoln-era debate over who to let in compare to the immigration debate now?

America always seems to be embroiled in the question of who should enter the country. Who should be encouraged, or who should be discouraged, or who should be banned, or who should be deported. It's been going on for centuries, ever since the founding of the republic.

If you look today at the responses that we hear from certain anti-immigration forces about endangering Americans – creating a separate culture, replacing us, the fear of being replaced – all of that has been heard before.

It happened when the Irish started coming in the 1840s, and then the German Protestants in the late 1840s. ... Then in the 1890s, when Eastern and Southern Europeans came, and Jews came, there was exactly the same kind of resistance and fear. Same with the anti-Asian immigration laws.

Q: Early in his political career, Lincoln, along with other Whigs, accused Democrats of coaxing ineligible Irish immigrants to vote for their cause. How much merit did those voter fraud claims have then?

As little merit as they have today. Were there occasional incidents? I'm sure there were. And Lincoln himself fell into this kind of ugly trope during the election ... for Senate in 1858. We have a letter from him, in which he reports to his campaign colleagues that he saw "about 15 Celtic gentlemen" ... who had just arrived in the city, and maybe detectives should be hired to see if they were coming here to vote illegally.

On the other hand, even earlier than that, he was in favor of noncitizen immigrants voting in municipal elections. Because he felt that they were being taxed with services, and participated in the municipal culture, and therefore should have responsibilities and obligations and rights.

Q: I wonder if you can talk about the evolution of Lincoln's support for immigrants and how that related to his antislavery work.

There was a relationship.

He identifies early with the Whig Party. [It included] a lot of Easterners who are anti-immigration as part of the Whig big tent, I guess. And the reason for it is that immigrants' first port of call in the United States were the Eastern cities: Boston, New York, Philadelphia. And that's where nativism first reared its ugly head, because most of the Irish arrivals joined the Democratic Party almost as soon as they arrived, for good reason. The Democrats courted them. The Democrats reached out to them and promised them guidance in establishing themselves in the city.

So, Lincoln and the Whigs were suspicious of these new Democrats, anyone who was added to the Democratic ranks. But early on, there was a riot in Philadelphia, an anti-nativist riot, a really ugly one, with casualties. ... And Lincoln and other Whigs quickly disassociated themselves from mob violence and stressed that there had to be a recognized, universal system of accepting immigrants and adding them to citizenship.

It's important to know, by the way, how easy it was to become a citizen. ... In those days, you came into the country, there were no walls, no [Immigration and Customs Enforcement], no discouragement. America wanted people, needed people. Aside from this prejudicial resistance, they simply entered. They signed some papers. Five years later they could return and apply for citizenship and earn voting rights.

As far as the kinship to the antislavery movement: When nativism became a big force in American politics, it evolved into a real political party known as the American Party, or more informally as the Know-Nothing Party. They ran a presidential candidate in 1856, who did very well. They elected a governor of Massachusetts. They elected public officials in Illinois. They were a force to be reckoned with. And Lincoln, at this time, was helping to organize the brand-new, antislavery Republican Party. And he needed the biggest tent he could open to swell the ranks of this brand-new organization. So Whigs, who no longer had a party, were encouraged into the new Republican Party.

He let the word out that if there were antislavery forces within the Know-Nothing movement, and there were, they would be welcome to join the Republican Party as well. So, at the same time he was creating an antislavery coalition, he was not shutting off the nativists for their past sins.

Q: How much did merit – versus humanitarian concerns – factor into Lincoln's immigration ideals?

I don't think it was a merit-based system, because most of the people coming in were entry-level positions.

Yes, there were indentures. There were all sorts of difficulties. But there was opportunity. And Lincoln made sure that the Homestead Act, which offered free land in the West to people who would settle and cultivate it, extended to immigrants as well, which was an enormous opportunity.

So it wasn't merit-based so much. It was opportunity-based. Lincoln always believed in what my late friend Gabor Boritt, who just died – a great historian who was himself an immigrant from Hungary – called the "right to rise."

Lincoln believed that anyone who wanted to work, and had talent, and had ambition, and most of all was willing to do the work had the right to go as far as the American experiment allowed you to go. And I think he ultimately came to believe that extended to Black people as well ... especially once they fought for their own freedom in the Union Army.

Q: How did foreign-born troops contribute to Civil War victory?

Lincoln realized from the get-go that the advantage in man power ... was going to be magnified in the Union Army, because of the foreign-born population. And what Lincoln did immediately and so brilliantly was encourage enlistments from Irish- and German-born citizens.

With the Irish, it was a big political stretch, because they were Democrats. He couldn't be sure, at the beginning, that they would be fighting under his command, as commander in chief, to restore the union.

Germans were mostly Republican and mostly antislavery. It was a more natural fit. But he also encouraged foreign-speaking regiments to enlist.

There was a requirement in the military code, at that point, that soldiers had to speak English. They sort of just ignored it, and recruited.

Q: If he helmed the White House today, how might Lincoln address our deep political polarization over immigration?

I would like to believe that he would be perplexed and disappointed that we don't try to create a pathway to citizenship and encourage immigration. I think the idea of roving bands of masked people – picking up people who are working here, going to school

here, and living here – would be abhorrent to him.

America had no tolerance for criminals seeking new criminal opportunities in the United States. And if you read some of the anti-immigration editorials, they really sound like they could have been written yesterday: We will get the “refuse” from the “sinks” of Europe if we open the doors. But that proved to be untrue. The Irish and German immigrant gained footholds in the United States and enriched the culture.

Maybe he would turn the new ballroom into an immigration center. That’s my dream. ■

She sees the forest *and* the trees

Growing up in a family of loggers, Suzanne Simard always loved forests. Her boundary-pushing research reveals other, deeper layers to the forest ecosystem.

By **Richard Schiffman** / Contributor

There are only a few scientists who have in recent decades changed the way we view the natural world. Perhaps not coincidentally, most of them are women.

One thinks of Jane Goodall, whose landmark study of chimpanzees in Tanzania’s Gombe Stream National Park demonstrated that chimps possess distinctive personalities and rich emotional lives, and form hierarchical societies not unlike our own. Marine biologist Rachel Carson sounded the alarm about the dangers posed by the pesticide DDT and other synthetic chemicals to the fragile web of life on Earth. And microbiologist Lynn Margulis helped develop the Gaia hypothesis, which posits that the Earth can be viewed as a single self-regulating organism. The planet is a complex entity whose living and inorganic elements are interdependent, and whose life-forms actively modify the environment to maintain the most hospitable conditions for flourishing.

Suzanne Simard is another researcher in this paradigm-bending mold. What Simard shares with her pioneering sister scientists is the conviction that humans are not separate from nature, but integral participants in life’s unfolding drama. This is the perspective she shares in her new book, “When the Forest Breathes: Renewal and Resilience in the Natural World,” which combines personal memoir with descriptions of her scientific investigations.

We learn about Simard’s struggles with her health and with grief, and how these experiences resonated with her growing awareness of the natural cycles within the forest.

“I wanted to learn what the mother trees could teach me about survival and adaptability, about life and death,” she writes.

Simard was born into a family of loggers and grew up in a rare inland rainforest near the city of Nelson, in British Columbia. She went on to study forest ecology at the University of British Columbia, where she engaged in the fieldwork that became the basis of the bestselling “Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest.” In the book, she makes the case that trees routinely communicate with one another, share carbon and other resources through mycorrhizal networks underground, and forge cooperative relationships among themselves and with other species in their immediate environment.

It was that rare science book that fired the public imagination,

becoming the model for Richard Powers’ bestselling novel “The Overstory,” as well as a Hollywood film about Simard’s life, which is still in production.

In “Finding the Mother Tree,” Simard challenges the idea of survival of the fittest, which holds that every living organism is locked in a fight to the death for limited resources with every other organism. Though Simard acknowledges that competition plays an important role in the regulation of life, so, too, does cooperation, she asserts. The forest thrives when competition and cooperation are in balance.

“One of my key findings,” Simard writes, “is that the biggest, oldest trees – the mother trees – are the energetic keystones of the forest.” These trees sequester more than half the carbon in the forest, helping to slow the progression of climate change. They also serve as the hub of fungal networks.

These dynamic mycorrhizal networks have been dubbed the “wood wide web” by the science journal *Nature*, in an article about Simard’s findings. But Simard does not take personal credit for its discovery. She contends that Indigenous people have long understood the intricate interconnections with the forest. The ancient worldviews of people such as the Kwiakah, Ma’amtigila, and Haida in British Columbia are offering us a new way of understanding life, Simard says, which is really a very old way: the appreciation of the radical interdependence of everything in nature.

While Simard’s ideas have received a generally enthusiastic reception from the public, they have received mixed reviews from her fellow scientists, some of whom accuse her of anthropomorphizing trees – investing them with intelligence and agency. Simard replies that the data she and others have collected over the past few decades speaks for itself.

But she isn’t content with showing us that trees are more remarkable than we’ve given them credit for. Simard wants readers to be inspired by her findings to save them. Much of the book is an impassioned argument for preserving forests and helping them to regenerate.

In a time of global warming and large-scale extinction, humans can no longer simply do science for science’s sake. Simard says we need to use our knowledge of nature’s own cycles of renewal to repair damaged ecosystems and help forests to cope with a changing climate. She says it is critical that we develop science-based alternatives to the clear-cut logging that has felled more than 97% of British Columbia’s old-growth forests.

Data shows that it will take centuries for clear-cut forests in Canada and elsewhere to recover, if indeed they ever do. The heavy machinery employed by loggers compacts the soil and destroys the understory species that are vital for the health of the forest. Such logging leaves little behind to “bootstrap the ecosystem back to health.”

Clear-cuts open the land to flooding and erosion. They also leave remaining forests at increased risk for wildfires. Where forests are cut down, rainfall driven by the transpiration from trees decreases. The climate becomes hotter and drier. Lush ecosystems can turn to virtual deserts overnight. The biodiversity that keeps the forest healthy is critically reduced.

Simard writes that, in 2001, as a result of human disturbance, the forests of Canada “shifted from being net sinks of greenhouse gases [which absorb and hold carbon] to net sources.” Such gases are generated by decomposing organic matter and the burning of slash left by loggers.

In an effort to explore alternative logging methods that help to

preserve forests, The Mother Tree Project was launched in 2015 by Simard and other scientists at the University of British Columbia.

Her message then, as now: We need to preserve our forests, not just for the forest's sake, but for our own.

"When the forest breathes out, we breathe in," Simard writes. "When the forest thrives, we thrive. When the forest lives, we live." ■

What are you reading? Monitor readers share their favorite titles.

I recently read "Good Dirt" by Charmaine Wilkerson. A well-formed novel, in my opinion, about tragedy and recovery among the wealthy. Race in America is significant in this novel, and the author fares well in writing from multiple perspectives – Black woman, white woman, white man, and others.

The author credits the nonfiction book "All That She Carried" by Tiya Miles for the spark that became "Good Dirt," and I have that on my side of the bed, too. I've had "All That She Carried" for many library renewals; "Good Dirt" was a quick read. In any case, Miles' book is academic and lovely, but a different style, and more work to read than "Good Dirt" (no offense, of course). So now I feel I can excuse myself from Miles' book – but that's cheating.

I've also been reading "Chronicles of a Lizard Nobody: The Hat of Great Importance," by Patrick Ness, with my children. We read the first one, and we all enjoyed the sense of humor. Some of it was above my 8-year-old's head, and certainly my 5-year-old's, but there was plenty to enjoy for all of us. It also has themes of social boundaries, hinting at race and socioeconomic diversity.

– Erika Kraus, Gardner, Kansas

CULTURE

BISHRAPUR, BANGLADESH

Ancient art form weaves new opportunities

Dhaka is the beating heart of Bangladesh's textile industry. But beyond the capital, women are meeting a demand for traditional, handwoven rugs.

By Simon Montlake / Staff writer

Muhammad Hazrat Ali's cramped village factory is a far cry from the mechanized garment plants of Bangladesh's capital, where around 4 million workers churn out billions of dollars worth of apparel for export every year.

It takes all day to reach his business from Dhaka; the border with India is closer. Inside the modest cluster of buildings, the click and clack of handlooms, operated mostly by women, blend with barnyard sounds outside.

But this small business, surrounded by fields of rice and wheat, is tied to Bangladesh's booming garment industry, as evidenced by the giant bales of cotton scraps stacked at the entrance. Mr.

Ali recycles this fabric into handwoven rugs and mats, known as *shataranji*, a traditional Bangladeshi craft that has helped uplift rural communities. It's a source of income for tens of thousands of handloom workers in northern Bangladesh, and has also put the region on the map for importers in Europe looking for handmade home decor.

"It's made by hand and people respect that," says Mr. Ali, who employs 300 people in his factory and at nearby houses.

The craft evolves

Exactly what *shataranji* is, and how it took root here, is hard to pinpoint. Some claim the tradition dates back to the Mughal era – *shataranji* is a Persian word – when the thick-knit, artistic rugs supposedly adorned the emperor's palace.

That artistry was evident to a 19th-century British colonial official known as Mr. Nisbet, who supported *shataranji* weavers in the northern city of Rangput. Thanks in large part to Mr. Nisbet's patronage, *shataranji* rugs became fashionable to own and were exported to other British colonies, and a nearby town was later renamed Nisbetganj to recognize his role in promoting the craft.

Throughout the 20th century, the craft evolved. Investors opened new factories in Rangput to produce more floor mats for export and for Bangladesh's growing middle class, and the craft spread to other communities, including Mr. Ali's. Nonprofits alighted on *shataranji* as a potential livelihood project for marginalized groups who could work at home on looms. And the booming garment industry had plenty of scraps to offload, so recycled-cotton *shataranji* rugs took off. You can now find them at Ikea.

At her home, Champa Bala turns cotton scraps into mats on a loom mounted next to her bed. She sits all day, working the loom with foot pedals in a hole dug into the packed-mud floor. By the end of the day, she's produced around nine mats, netting her nearly \$2.

Before she trained on the loom in 2019, Ms. Bala, who belongs to Bangladesh's Hindu minority, had never worked. Her husband drives a van, but work is harder to find in the dry season, so her income makes a difference. "Now, we're much better off. Before, we couldn't eat three times a day," she says. The family has saved some money and bought goats and a cow.

Her mats go to a trader who then sells them to Bangladeshi retailers, usually run by nonprofits to showcase national products – including those made by people who are trained by nonprofits, as Ms. Bala was. Her loom came from Eco-Social Development Organization, a group based in nearby Thakurgaon.

Demand for shataranji

Muhammed Shahid Uz Zaman, the founder and executive director of ESDO, says handicrafts can offer a path out of poverty for villagers who don't own land. But this only works if there's actual demand for handmade products, as there is now for *shataranji*. "In Bangladesh, the market is the main problem," he says. "You can produce a lot but not have a market."

Mr. Ali started his business in 2002 after three years working in India as a handloom operator. He began with four looms and a handful of workers at a single site. As the market grew, so did his business, and he borrowed money to invest in more looms and hire more workers.

Today, he pays his loom operators \$3 to \$5 a day, depending on their experience and productivity, and hopes to expand operations.

"I want to create more job opportunities" in *shataranji*, he says.

While the types of mats that Mr. Ali produces are more functional

than fine craftsmanship, Bangladeshi shataranji can be refined and distinctive, says Shawon Akand, an artist and curator who studies the industry. He would like to see young artists collaborate with weavers to incorporate new designs and styles, as well as to revive traditional designs. Art is more than paintings; vernacular weaving is also art, he says.

But despite the popularity of shataranji abroad, he hasn't found any takers in the art world. "In Bangladesh, people don't believe that textiles is an art form, especially the academicians," he says. ■

SUDOKU

Sudoku difficulty: ★☆☆☆☆

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

How to do Sudoku

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

Crossword and Sudoku solutions

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

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

Crossword

ACROSS

- 1. Get a serve past
- 4. “___ Willie Winkie”
- 7. Panama or pillbox
- 10. Not a hit
- 11. Noah’s curve?
- 12. Ballpark figures?
- 14. Accident report?
- 15. M.D., familiarly
- 16. South American capital
- 17. Spruce juice
- 19. The confederacy did it
- 21. Commanded
- 23. “Oui” opposite
- 24. Family providers?
- 28. Barber’s challenge
- 31. Chapel response
- 32. General address?
- 33. Soiree
- 34. They’re shorter than LPs
- 35. Eat-anything types
- 37. Detective’s cry
- 38. Hardly a gentleman
- 39. Defamation
- 43. “If ___ Walls Could Talk”
- 47. Hype incessantly
- 48. Beach acquisition
- 50. “Genesis” setting
- 51. Cold, hard substance?
- 52. Bigger than med.
- 53. Got better, as wine
- 54. Wimbledon division
- 55. Roxy Music’s Brian
- 56. Tag code for Colorado-bound luggage

DOWN

- 1. Vera’s intro?
- 2. Cagney and Lacey, e.g.
- 3. Delta neighbor

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

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- 4. Roll of dough?
- 5. Cupid’s counterpart
- 6. Like a three-dollar bill
- 7. “I Am Woman” singer Reddy
- 8. Perennially parched
- 9. Busted, like a bronco
- 10. “The Hunt ___ Red October”
- 13. Far from cloud nine
- 18. After-taxes
- 20. Long-leaved lettuce
- 22. Take apart
- 24. Scotsman’s “no”
- 25. King’s equiv.
- 26. Foot, to a zoologist
- 27. It can be deadly or mortal
- 28. ___ del Plata, Argentina
- 29. Barcelona bravo
- 30. Faux follower
- 33. Divinity
- 35. Georg’s electrical unit
- 36. Vintner’s vessel
- 37. Old word for zero
- 39. Ozone layer pollutant, briefly
- 40. ___ and alack
- 41. Shake a tail?
- 42. Fisherman’s “the one that got away”
- 44. Competitive leg up
- 45. “Has Anybody Here ___ Kelly?”
- 46. Pet Shop Boys’ “West ___ Girls”
- 49. Doctors Without Borders, e.g.