

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

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

— MARY BAKER EDDY

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C O N T E N T S

FROM THE EDITORS

Finding shifts in thought – sometimes, toward joy1

NEWS: DISPATCHES

Republicans push for proof of citizenship for voting1

NATO says it will bolster security around Greenland1

With Russia grinding closer, Ukrainians weigh the cost
of land for peace2

Trump rescinds EPA's ability to regulate greenhouse gases . .3

Bangladesh holds first free and fair elections in decades . . .3

Iran-US talks make 'progress,' but few signs of compromise .4

Annual inflation eased in January.4

OUR WORLD4

NEWS: GLOBAL CURRENTS

Quoting the Bible, more Democrats lean in to their
Christianity5

New START expiration frees US and Russia to expand their
nuclear arsenals. China's has already been growing.6

Botswana's diamond-dependent economy under pressure. .7

As data centers rise, more communities are pushing back . .8

NUMBERS IN THE NEWS10

THE EXPLAINER

A guide to the Epstein files: Will any new charges result? . .10

PEOPLE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Via camel, rickshaw, whatever it takes, Alif Laila Book Bus
Society reaches children11

REPORTERS ON THE JOB.12

ON THE COVER

Apollo to Artemis: US launches a 'third era' of space travel .13

EDITORIALS

Mending the vestiges of jihadism.14

A new climate norm: Less carbon, continued growth15

Africa's opportunity for minerals mastery.15

READERS RESPOND16

THE HOME FORUM

Why libraries have a hold on me16

A CHRISTIAN SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE17

CULTURE

As my life assistant, AI was almost too eager to help18

These dog lovers get a Golden break from a ruff news
cycle.20

BOOKS

The serious business behind making toys.20

SUDOKU21

CROSSWORD22

Finding shifts in thought – sometimes, toward joy

Some time ago, when I was the environment and climate writer at the Monitor, I remember asking a longtime editor for advice about finding fresh stories on my beat. He had a ready answer. Look, he said, for the shifts in thought. Where are people evolving in their thinking? Where is there an honest grappling over the way topics or people or places are conceived? And how are those thought shifts rippling outward and changing lives?

This type of story ideation, and writing, can be challenging. It takes time and work. But it was great advice because this deep observation and reporting about thought can lead to a sort of journalism that is expansive – one that helps readers both “get above the fray” and also feel grounded in today’s fast, frothy news ecosystem.

This week’s magazine reflects this Monitor approach, as well as our commitment to global coverage.

Contributor Keletso Thobega, for instance, writes about the declining diamond industry in Botswana. But she doesn’t stay at that level. She uses that economic news to explore growing questions about whether Botswana, once lauded for avoiding the “resource curse” that has troubled its African neighbors, has itself become too dependent on one commodity.



By Stephanie Hanes
Print Editor

Staff writer Ann Scott Tyson explores whether the world’s major powers are rethinking their weapons treaties because of a growing Chinese nuclear presence. Staff writer Henry Gass looks at how a new exploration of space travel has shaped the upcoming Artemis II mission. And staff writer Sophie Hills explores whether there has been a thought shift in the Democratic Party

about publicly embracing Christian teachings to justify policy positions.

This approach doesn’t mean the Monitor isn’t also focused on getting you clear facts about the news that just happened. We are. We’ve launched a new app to both keep you informed and let you go deeper into the subjects we cover. You should download it now.

And, finally, golden retrievers.

There’s no way for me to finish this column without urging you to read Sarah Matusek’s piece about the “world’s largest unofficial gathering” of golden retrievers in Golden, Colorado. Thousands of dogs and even more thousands of humans show up for this annual event of fur and fun. Her piece isn’t just about “pawsitive” news and dog puns (looking at you, Managing Editor Kurt Shillinger), or even the humor of huskies wearing disguises to fit in.

It’s about how, as serious and even troubling news reports seem to fly in from all corners, it’s important to recognize the brighter, lighter realities of life. There is deep value in events that celebrate love, fun, and, of course, man’s best friend. And there is deep value in reporting and reading about these.

Sometimes, the best thought shift is embracing joy. ■

Republicans push for proof of citizenship for voting

House Republicans have passed a bill that would impose new requirements for voter eligibility.

The SAVE America Act would require proof of citizenship to register to vote in federal elections and a government-issued photo ID to cast a ballot. The idea of verifying citizenship is widely popular among Americans but is strongly opposed by Democrats, who say it would prevent millions of citizens from voting.

The bill, properly known as the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility Act, has been a priority of Republicans for years. They say it’s necessary to stop noncitizens from registering and voting, something data shows does occur but is rare enough not to influence election outcomes.

Other versions of the bill have passed the House but stalled in the Senate, where 60 votes are needed to overcome a filibuster. This time, GOP Senate Majority Leader John Thune has said he wants to at least bring the measure to a vote – partly to force Democrats to go on the record on the issue. This all comes as the Trump administration, which supports the bill, has questioned the integrity of America’s elections ahead of this year’s midterms. President Donald Trump has made similar complaints about elections before.

Under the bill, most people would need a passport or birth certificate to register to vote. Additional options include military IDs and records of service, as well as enhanced driver’s licenses offered in a handful of states. People who submit voter registration forms by mail would still need to present proof of citizenship in person.

The bill also requires people to present a photo ID to cast their ballot. Thirty-six states have voter ID laws, but the SAVE America Act would impose stricter provisions than most of those, experts say.

Despite his claims of a stolen election, no evidence of fraud has surfaced that would call into question the results of the 2020 election, which Mr. Trump lost to Joe Biden.

– Caitlin Babcock / Staff writer

NATO says it will bolster security around Greenland

NATO announced it is launching a new mission to beef up security in the Arctic, as Secretary-General Mark Rutte warned that “the Russians and the Chinese are becoming more active” in the region. Some analysts say the mission, dubbed Arctic Sentry, is an effort to head off tensions between the United States and the transatlantic alliance, which heightened last month after the Trump administration declined to rule out military force to acquire Greenland, a semi-autonomous territory of Denmark.

“Basically, it’s important that we collectively understand that [Mr. Trump] has a big point here,” Mr. Rutte said last month at a gathering of top NATO defense officials in Brussels. Mr. Rutte has praised President Trump as the catalyst that has forced NATO members to boost their defense budget contributions to meet or exceed the 2% GDP target and commit to 5% by 2035.

– Staff

With Russia grinding closer, Ukrainians weigh the cost of land for peace

V iacheslav Zgurskyi and Tetiana Nestor went unscathed when a Russian glide bomb struck close to their home in January. But the near miss shattered what little sense of safety the couple had left in the city of Zaporizhzhia.

The shrapnel from the bomb punched jagged holes in the roof and walls, and gouged the family car. Their neighbor's house lies in ruins.

The family returns only briefly, such as now, to feed the dog. The couple's daughter, Veronika, shuffles about the home in a puffy winter jacket. Fatigue is etched on all their faces.

But the deepest loss in this humble Ukrainian home is unseen. The couple's son, Vadym, was killed in March 2023 while fighting Russian forces. As a result, the negotiation efforts being led by the United States to end the war, including the most recent round in Geneva, hold little interest.

"Why should we care anymore?" asks Mr. Zgurskyi. "The most important thing is for the killing to stop."

With the war in Ukraine having devolved into an inching advance by Russian forces this winter, the price of the conflict is borne by civilians, both near and far from the front lines. People worry about staying warm, as Russian strikes on energy infrastructure trigger shortages amid freezing temperatures.

Over time, that pressure has shifted Ukrainian attitudes toward territorial concessions in the name of peace. But survey data shows that the shift is more toward conditional pragmatism rather than acceptance of Russian demands, say observers.

The question Ukrainians want answered: "What will prevent future Russian aggression?"

Russia has consistently tied peace to Ukrainian territorial concessions, with Zaporizhzhia among the regions it seeks to absorb. A central challenge in the U.S.-led peace talks is the future of eastern Ukraine's resource-rich areas, along with other territories Moscow has occupied and claims as its own.

As the war in Ukraine enters its fifth year, the war triggered by Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022 has inflicted a staggering human toll. Russian forces have suffered nearly 1.2 million killed or injured in the war, while gaining only marginal ground over the past year.

"No major power has suffered anywhere near these numbers of casualties or fatalities in any war since World War II," analysts at the Center for Strategic and International Studies noted in a report last month. They estimated that the combined Russian and Ukrainian battlefield dead and wounded could reach 2 million by spring.

After an initial Ukrainian counteroffensive reclaimed swaths of territory, Russia reclaimed the initiative in 2024, but it has captured only a tiny fraction of Ukrainian land – a few thousand square miles – since then. Major offensives have yielded advances so small they are counted in meters, not kilometers. The gap between effort expended and territory gained is widening for Moscow, but Ukraine is also battling fatigue and manpower shortages.

Despite the grinding toll, the majority of Ukrainians continue to reject territorial concessions (even in the hard-hit industrial regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, collectively known as Donbas, which are largely under Russian control), according to nationwide

surveys conducted in January by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology.

"There are two main problems. First of all, there is very low trust toward Russia and high expectations that Russians will attack Ukraine again in any ceasefire," says Anton Grushetskyi, executive director of the institute.

"Related to this problem, trust in our Western allies is low," he adds. "If [President] Trump says, 'I give my word that Russia will not attack again,' for Ukrainians that is not enough. ... The majority still expect the war will continue for many, many months and perhaps years."

Compared with two or three years ago, notes Mr. Grushetskyi, more people now accept the idea of freezing the front line, even without peacekeepers. But that acceptance comes with the proviso that there is enforceable support for Ukraine in the form of specific weapon systems and ammunition.

"We don't have territories right now where the majority would say we are accepting peace under any conditions," says Mr. Grushetskyi. "In the most recent survey, 54% rejected leaving Donbas in exchange for security guarantees, while 39% said they could accept such a scenario."

"They're supporting this scenario not because they're Russia lovers, but because they are psychologically tired or desperate," adds the sociologist. "If the security guarantees ... include European and American forces in eastern Ukraine, near the front line, then I think over 50% would have accepted this scenario."

Ukrainians' insistence on meaningful security guarantees is rooted in history and lessons learned from previous negotiations. Mykhailo Podoliak, an adviser to Ukraine's presidential office, says Ukraine wants its Western partners to focus on a postwar security architecture that deters future Russian aggression.

That includes a strong Ukrainian military, European responsibility for regional security, investment in Ukraine's defense industry, possible international contingents deployed on Ukrainian territory, and a leading guarantor role for the U.S.

Mariia Kucherenko, senior analyst at the Come Back Alive Initiatives Center, points to the cautionary lessons from the past. She cites Ukraine's post-independence nuclear disarmament, when Kyiv gave up the world's third-largest nuclear arsenal in exchange for security guarantees under the Budapest Memorandum. That agreement proved subject to interpretation by the signatories, particularly the United States and Russia.

The result was a Ukraine left vulnerable to Russian attack, Ms. Kucherenko says, manifesting in the annexation of Crimea in March 2014.

Ukraine, Ms. Kucherenko insists, will never again agree to ceasefires without robust enforcement mechanisms. In her view, prior agreements did not collapse because Ukraine rejected peace, but because violations carried no cost. "Security comes first. This principle is written by blood in our memory."

– Dominique Soguel / Special correspondent

■ *Oleksandr Naselenko supported reporting for this article.*

Trump rescinds EPA's ability to regulate greenhouse gases

President Trump and Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lee Zeldin on Feb. 12 ushered in a new era of climate regulation, effectively rescinding a 16-year-old foundation for federal policies to reduce emissions of heat-trapping gases such as carbon dioxide.

The White House says the move will unshackle a needlessly regulated energy sector, though many climate scientists see the step as undercutting action on an urgent priority for the United States and the world.

Since 2009, what's known as an "endangerment finding" by the EPA has classified greenhouse gases (GHGs) as a threat to public health. In turn, that designation has served as a legal basis for emissions regulations. In undoing it, Trump administration officials argue the endangerment finding stood on shaky legal ground.

Mr. Zeldin, in announcing the reversal, said "The Trump EPA is strictly following the letter of the law, returning common sense to policy, delivering consumer choice to Americans and advancing the American dream."

The Environmental Defense Fund has said it will challenge the reversal in court.

"The Supreme Court ruled in 2007 that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has the responsibility and authority to limit climate pollution, and the Endangerment Finding has been essential to the progress we've all benefited from ever since," said Fred Krupp, president of Environmental Defense Fund, in a statement.

Unless blocked in court, the move represents the most aggressive rejection of climate change policies by the Trump administration thus far. It also comes as renewable energy sources are increasingly competitive in price – and popular even among Trump voters – compared with coal and other fossil-fuel energy sources.

Recent polls show strong Republican support (61% in a Pew Research Center survey) for solar energy farms, alongside other energy sources, amid concerns about high electricity costs. The economy has been continuing to move away from fossil fuels, with GHGs declining by about 1% each year since 2007, according to the Rhodium Group. The Trump policy changes, while not erasing that trend, might slow it considerably.

The administration sees the rollback as a boost to the economy, saying the endangerment finding is "unnecessarily expensive." Cars are one key sector that will be affected, because the finding served as the legal foundation for regulating vehicle greenhouse emissions under the Clean Air Act.

The endangerment finding is also the foundation for regulating coal and gas power plants and the methane levels produced by both the oil and gas industries.

Mr. Trump has cast the coal industry as pivotal to U.S. energy production going forward.

– Victoria Hoffmann / Staff writer

Bangladesh holds first free and fair elections in decades

Tarique Rahman, the leader of the center-right Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), secured a historic victory in February in the country's first election following a student-led uprising in the summer of 2024. This election breaks a cycle: The last time Bangladesh held a multiparty election that was judged fair and free was in 2008.

"This time, we will cast our own votes," Mirza Fakhru Alamgir, the BNP's secretary-general, said before the election. "Our own votes."

After 15 years of one-party rule legitimized by sham elections, the promise that votes would be cast and counted fairly was a potent one. The Feb. 12 election was seen as a crucial step toward a restoration of multiparty democracy in Bangladesh – and a marker of how far it has come since the student-led uprising drew global attention.

Bangladesh became the first in a series of Generation Z-led protests in 2024 and 2025, ranging from Peru to Indonesia. Many borrowed inspiration and tactics from other movements, becoming a sort of chain reaction carried by online activism. Not all succeeded as Bangladesh's movement did in bringing down a government.

The uprising, which was brutally suppressed by security forces and paramilitaries with the loss of at least 1,400 lives, unseated Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who had been in power since 2009. In August 2024, she fled into exile in India, leaving behind a shaken country and a brittle economy that an interim civilian administration has struggled at times to govern.

In a country of 175 million, where about half the population is under age 30, this current political landscape means tens of millions of eligible voters had never known a credible election. Among the nation's 127 million registered voters are Bangladeshis living overseas, who were allowed to cast postal ballots for the first time.

Mr. Rahman, after nearly 17 years in exile, returned to the country and achieved a landslide victory. He follows in the footsteps of his late parents: Ziaur Rahman, the seventh president of Bangladesh, who was assassinated in 1981, and his mother, Khaleda Zia, the first female prime minister of Bangladesh, who served three terms.

Mr. Rahman's party, BNP, won 212 of the 299 available seats in the country's parliament.

Voters were also asked to approve a set of constitutional reforms that were designed to guard against autocratic backsliding and codify some of the demands for change that emerged from the uprising. These include term limits for lawmakers, a more powerful presidency to check the prime minister's authority, and measures to counter corruption and conflicts of interest.

The reforms were hashed out by leaders from across the political spectrum – an achievement in itself, given the internecine politics of a country whose violent birth in 1971 remains a contested history. But checks and balances in a political system only matter as far as politicians feel bound by the rules and norms put in place.

"We all recognize the fact that no matter how many reforms are undertaken in the electoral space ... if the political parties don't themselves reform in the right direction, it's going to be tough," says Mir Nadia Nivin, who chaired the interim government's electoral reform commission.

– Simon Montlake / Staff writer

Iran-US talks make ‘progress,’ but few signs of compromise

A second round of talks between Iran and the United States in Geneva on Feb. 17 over Tehran’s nuclear program yielded agreement on “guiding principles,” according to Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, but there were few signs of compromise from either side.

Mr. Araghchi said “the path for a deal has started,” and that draft proposals would be exchanged before setting a date for a third round.

An American official said: “Progress was made, but there are still a lot of details to discuss.” The U.S. official, who declined to be named, said Iran would provide detailed proposals within two weeks to address “open gaps in our positions.”

Yet the talks are taking place in the shadow of recent events that have raised tensions, and renewed the prospects of conflict, as both sides voice demands unacceptable to the other.

Iran wants to limit talks only to curbing its nuclear program, in exchange for lifting American sanctions that have throttled its economy.

President Donald Trump has made clear that he wants Iran’s remaining nuclear program dismantled, as well as – in an echo of Israeli demands – limits on the range of Iran’s missile arsenal, and ending Iran’s support for regional militia allies such as Hezbollah.

Mr. Trump said Feb. 13 that regime change in Iran is “the best thing that could happen,” and that the Islamic Republic would regret not making a deal.

But Iran says American terms amount to surrender. Mr. Araghchi, before the Geneva talks, said he brought “real ideas to achieve a fair and equitable deal. What is not on the table: submission before threats.”

Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Feb. 17 said Iran’s missile program was nonnegotiable.

“Possessing deterrent weapons is necessary and obligatory for a nation,” Mr. Khamenei said. “The Americans illogically say you should not have this type of missile or that range, while this matter concerns the Iranian nation and has nothing to do with them.”

Iran is still reeling from a lethal crackdown by regime security forces on street protests by regime security forces in January that left more than 7,000 people dead, according to activists.

Mr. Trump promised to “hit very hard” if protesters were killed, and has sought to raise pressure for a deal by amassing a naval armada aimed at Iran, which includes two aircraft carrier battle groups and air assets throughout the region.

– Scott Peterson / Staff writer

Annual inflation eased in January

U.S. inflation fell to 2.4% from the annualized rate of 2.7% a month earlier, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in February. Core inflation, which excludes food and energy, also fell to 2.5%, its lowest level since 2021. Together with the release of a strong jobs report on Feb. 11, the consumer price index suggests that the economy is starting off 2026 on stronger footing than in 2025, with employment rising and price increases for goods and services slowing, despite President Trump’s tariffs on foreign goods.

At the same time, the latest Congressional Budget Office report suggests federal deficits and debt are set to climb over the next decade, driven by rising costs for Social Security, Medicare, and interest payments. Since last year, projected deficits for the period from 2026 to 2035 have risen by \$1.4 trillion. While higher tariffs are expected to generate \$3 trillion in additional revenue, the agency warned they could also add to inflation in the next few years.

– Staff

OUR WORLD

Military-grade rubber, grown in the Gobi

China has cultivated an alternative rubber plant in the Gobi Desert to bolster its rubber supply, according to the South China Morning Post. Ten years ago, scientists launched an experiment to grow the plant, Duzhong, on 35 acres of desert wasteland. China, which depends on imports for 85% of its rubber consumption, plans to expand the crop beyond hundreds of thousands of acres.

– Ann Scott Tyson

‘Restricting citizens’ freedom is never the right answer.’

Telegram founder Pavel Durov declared this as Russia tightened artificial technical bottlenecks to disrupt the messaging app, claiming it doesn’t comply with laws on protecting user data and policing speech. Meanwhile, celebrity endorsements promote the state-backed app Max, which must be preloaded on all phones and computers sold in Russia. Mr. Durov said Max is “built for surveillance and political censorship.”

– Fred Weir

Drones replace suicide bombings

Off-the-shelf commercial drones from Chinese companies are becoming an increasingly popular weapon of war for jihadi fighters in West Africa. Smuggled across porous borders, the drones are sometimes loaded with explosives and deployed as an alternative to suicide bombings. But their other use – to spy and gather intelligence – allows groups such as Al Qaeda-linked Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin to coordinate attacks with greater precision.

– Ryan Lenora Brown

‘It’s the first Israeli drama they can connect to without reservation.’

That’s how Leora Kamenetzky described the reaction of Israel’s Arab citizens to the country’s hit TV series “Yaffa.” Yaffa is Arabic for Jaffa, the ancient Mediterranean city that’s part of greater Tel Aviv. Real-life interactions between its Jewish and Arab residents and the surge of gun violence plaguing the city’s Arab community inspired this suspense-filled tale of intersecting fates. In the series, the fatal shooting of a Jewish teen sets off a societal volcano.

– Dina Kraft

Quoting the Bible, more Democrats lean in to their Christianity

For decades, Republicans have embraced Christianity and faith-based leadership. A new crop of Democrats is doing the same.

By **Sophie Hills** / Staff writer

For generations now, the GOP has been far more comfortable than its opponents in quoting Bible verses and talking about how Christianity informs its politics. Democrats, meanwhile, have largely shied away from public proclamations of faith – such that critics say they have seemed apologetic about Christianity.

But a new crop of Democratic leaders is hoping to flip the script. Members of Congress across the United States – from Sen. Raphael Warnock of Georgia to Rep. Marie Gluesenkamp Perez of Washington, along with Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear – are talking more about how their public service is rooted in their Christian faith.

State Rep. James Talarico, a Presbyterian seminary student who is hoping to win a U.S. Senate seat in Texas, earned national attention for his unabashed quoting of the Bible – highlighted in a viral interview with podcaster Joe Rogan. Texas Rep. Jasmine Crockett, who goes up against Mr. Talarico in a primary vote on March 3, talks about her Baptist faith. And a cadre of faith-based political consultants stands ready to guide Democrats again this election cycle, hoping for a new boldness.

“As we go into the midterms ... I would love to see us flip [the narrative],” says April Delaney, a first-term congresswoman from the rural western panhandle of Maryland, who is Catholic. “The dialogue has to change.”

It’s the Democratic platform, she insists, that best reflects the values of charity, humility, and care that Jesus taught. And she wants more of her colleagues to say this.

“Who are we as Christians? And what does that mean? It’s not only a faith in Jesus, but it’s the tenets of what he really lifted up,” she says.

At the National Prayer Breakfast earlier this year, President Donald Trump said he didn’t know “how a person of faith can vote for a Democrat.”

Democratic officials – and certainly some Republicans – disagree with that statement. A survey last fall from the Pew Research Center, for instance, found that only 7% of American Christians said that supporting Mr. Trump is “essential to being a good Christian.”

Still, Democrats have steadily lost Christian voters to the Republican Party. White Evangelicals propelled President Ronald Reagan to the White House in 1980. In 2000, President George W. Bush won 68% of white evangelical Protestants and 53% of white mainline Protestants. By 2024, Mr. Trump won 85% of white Evangelicals and 57% of white mainline Protestants.

“To distance themselves in the political world from what the Republicans were doing, I think [Democrats] shied away from religion, which I think they have recognized was a mistake because it sort of

ceded the ground,” says the Rev. Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, assistant director of the Center for Public Theology and Public Policy at Yale University.

Some Democrats argue that they haven’t moved away from religion. Instead, they have tried to bolster a more inclusive version of it, focusing on interfaith work and recognizing that some people have had negative experiences with church or religion overall. Many Democrats have been alarmed by the explicitly Christian statements and policies from the second Trump administration, which to them raise concerns about the separation of church and state.

Political leaders “want the Democratic Party to be a place for people that is safe and open for people who don’t have religious identity, or have changed their religious identity, or feel hurt by religion,” says the Rev. Doug Pagitt, executive director of Vote Common Good, a nonprofit that encourages Christian voters to prioritize “common good” over party loyalty, and trains candidates to speak to faith.

But these efforts to be inclusive may have ended up excluding Christians who respond to Republicans’ way of referencing their faith, he says. In the 2024 Democratic Party platform, nearly every major religion other than Christianity was mentioned by name.

“People believe that Republicans want religion, especially Christianity, in America to succeed, and Democrats want it to recede,” he says. “You can’t be the major political party in America if you continue to say that you’re uninterested in the major religion in America.”

According to the Public Religion Research Institute’s 2024 “Census of American Religion,” some 62% of U.S. adults describe themselves as Christian. Eighty-four percent of Republicans are Christian, and while it’s a majority for Democrats, it’s a smaller one: 59% of the base in 2023.

President Barack Obama won the most evangelical Protestant votes of any Democrat since President Jimmy Carter. That share dropped when Hillary Clinton ran, and dropped again slightly with President Joe Biden before inching up again in 2024, when Vice President Kamala Harris ran.

“I’m personally obsessed with bringing people of faith back into the party, because this is where they belong,” says Billy Ray, a director and screenwriter of movies including the first “Hunger Games” and “Captain Phillips.” Mr. Ray, who is not Christian, works with about 50 Democratic candidates and 80 members of Congress on messaging.

He and a contingent of secular and religious voices are calling for Democrats to amplify a more moderate Christianity to answer the conservative Christianity expressed by leaders of Mr. Trump’s party.

“There has been this voice of faith informing and engaging and animating justice and equity for generations, so we should not pretend that it’s something new,” says the Rev. Dr. Derrick Harkins, who directed interfaith outreach for the Democratic National Committee and Mr. Obama’s 2012 campaign.

While Black Christians tend to vote for Democrats (83% voted for Ms. Harris), the party has sometimes been hesitant to allocate resources toward reaching white Christians, a group that generally votes Republican. But organizers think there are cracks in the support, particularly among mainline Christians.

Mr. Trump has a number of advisers who embrace the idea of the U.S. as an explicitly Christian country and some who have embraced the moniker of “Christian nationalism.”

“That change is, perhaps, leading more Democratic leaders to say, ‘We can’t just leave Christianity as something that could be defined

fully by the GOP,” says Melissa Deckman, a political scientist and CEO of the Public Religion Research Institute.

In February, the Pew Research Center released a report finding that, while white Evangelicals are some of the most reliable supporters of Mr. Trump, his approval rating among that group has dropped by 8 percentage points since early last year.

The Rev. Dr. Shannon Fleck, executive director of Faithful America, sees an openness to Democratic messaging from a broad range of Christians. Though her organization focuses on progressive Christians, she lives in Oklahoma, the heart of the Bible Belt.

“I am surrounded by folks that are more conservative than me, and I know that a large percentage of them are hugely bothered by the discrepancy and hypocrisy of what’s being said regarding faith, and what they’re seeing in the world,” she says.

“That is a growing edge that can easily be converted in an election.” ■

SEATTLE

New START expiration frees US and Russia to expand their nuclear arsenals. China’s has already been growing.

At a time when the will to curb nuclear proliferation is waning, China’s buildup could unleash a new wave of nuclear arms competition.

By Ann Scott Tyson / Staff writer

As the United States and Russia navigate uncharted waters without a nuclear arms treaty, China’s nuclear buildup is like a storm mounting on the horizon.

Beijing has dramatically multiplied its force since Chinese leader Xi Jinping came to power in 2012. China had held its stockpile steady at around 200 since the 1970s. Now, it contains more than 600 nuclear warheads and is projected to exceed 1,000 by 2030, according to a 2025 Pentagon report.

China is moving from a land-based force to a land-air-sea nuclear triad. It now has six nuclear-weapons-capable submarines, with one at sea at all times, experts say. Breaking with its traditional second-strike nuclear posture – a modest force designed to survive a first strike and inflict unacceptable damage on a soft target like a city – it’s developing an advanced force capable of taking out enemy nuclear missiles and fighting a nuclear war.

“China is on the path of a massive nuclear buildup with very little transparency about the end goal,” says Tong Zhao, senior fellow with the Nuclear Policy Program and Carnegie China. This, he says, is “driving a renewed nuclear competition.”

One reason the Trump administration declined to extend the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) was to gain leeway to respond to China’s rapid expansion, says Dr. Zhao: “[Washington] feels the need to react.”

China’s buildup

China’s leaders remain tight-lipped about their intentions for the nuclear arms expansion, but experts say one overarching objective is clear: A more powerful China.

“Xi Jinping wants China to be strong,” says Jeffrey Lewis, distinguished scholar of global security at Middlebury College. “The Xi Jinping vision is to have a nuclear force that looks more like Russia and the United States,” which currently control an estimated 86% of the world’s nuclear warheads.

China traditionally maintained a comparatively modest force, and reaching a broad parity with the U.S. and Russia would take time. But Beijing is concerned that if China appears weak, that could embolden U.S. aggression, experts say.

“President Xi wants a larger nuclear arsenal to counter America’s perception of Chinese strategic inferiority,” Dr. Zhao says.

In a public show of force, Mr. Xi presided over a huge military parade in Beijing in September that unveiled the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) newest intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), the DF-61. “The goal is to showcase the fast advancement of China’s strategic capability,” says Dr. Zhao.

To be sure, China’s nuclear weapons development has not been without glitches, including, most recently, widespread corruption. In recent years, Mr. Xi has overseen a major military purge that has netted several top commanders from the PLA’s Rocket Force, which controls the country’s nuclear and conventional missiles. Quality issues discovered with the lids of new silos China has been building may have contributed to the dismissals, experts say.

But it’s moving ahead swiftly enough to rattle Washington, which had initially called for China to join New START – a proposal that Beijing rejected. Now, China’s expansion threatens to fuel a new arms race.

“We are likely to see the U.S. starting to upload more warheads to missiles,” says Dr. Zhao. “This action-reaction dynamic ... will have broader global implications.”

Collaboration with Russia

From the U.S. perspective, China’s nuclear buildup brings several risks, both geopolitical and technical. One major concern in Washington is that China and Russia could join forces against their common adversary, the United States.

China could then attack Taiwan, and Russia could move into Europe, “daring the United States to respond,” says Rose Gottemoeller, a former American diplomat who served as Under Secretary for Arms Control at the U.S. State Department and was the chief U.S. negotiator of New START. “That’s the absolute worst case scenario that the United States is contemplating, given what we call the ‘two nuclear peer’ problem,” she says.

China and Russia almost certainly remain too wary of each other to conduct joint nuclear planning, integrate their forces, or threaten a joint nuclear strike against the U.S., experts say. But they are increasingly collaborating on nuclear weapons technology and in signaling exercises. For example, Chinese and Russian nuclear-capable bombers have conducted joint patrols over the Sea of Japan and South China Sea to show resolve to Tokyo and Washington.

Advancing without guardrails

China’s nuclear program is advancing in several key areas that the Pentagon and U.S. analysts view as risky and destabilizing.

These include China’s development of an early warning system, which would use infrared satellites and ground-based radars to al-

Botswana's diamond-dependent economy under pressure

Long celebrated for sidestepping the “resource curse,” the southern African nation is gradually becoming a cautionary tale as demand for diamonds declines.

By Keletso Thobega / Contributor

From above, one of the richest diamond mines in the world looks like a giant gray fingerprint smudged into the scrubland of southern Botswana.

Up close, it is a gaping hole, 1.5 miles long and nearly five football fields deep, and it has helped transform this rural nation from one of Africa's poorest countries at independence 60 years ago to one of its richest today.

Now the world's second-largest producer of diamonds, the country is also globally lauded for bucking the infamous “resource curse,” in which countries with abundant natural resources tend to face greater economic instability. Instead, Botswana has used its wealth to pull its population out of poverty.

But one of Africa's great success stories is increasingly becoming a cautionary tale about the perils of overdependence on a single natural resource. After half a century of nearly unbroken economic growth in Botswana, U.S. tariffs, the brisk rise of synthetic diamonds, and other transformations in the global diamond market are now threatening the country's glittering rise.

Disruptions in the diamond industry

Botswana's diamonds were forged billions of years ago by the heat and pressure of Earth's mantle, then spit toward the surface by volcanic eruptions. And even here, in one of the most diamond-rich corners of the Earth, they are exceptionally rare.

To put it in perspective, the two-story-tall dump trucks that trundle up the flanks of the Jwaneng mine each carry about 250 tons of chewed-up black rock. Inside is perhaps one carat – about 200 milligrams or 0.007 ounces – of gem-grade diamonds.

Diamonds produced in laboratories, on the other hand, take only a few weeks to manufacture, and the potential supply is nearly limitless. They also cost about 10% the price of natural diamonds.

Today, synthetic diamonds – the majority of which come from China and India – account for about one-fifth of the global diamond market, up from 1% a decade ago. Industry analysts predict the synthetic market will grow another 300% by 2034. Meanwhile, U.S. tariffs – including on countries such as India, where 90% of the world's diamonds are polished – have disrupted global diamond production, exacerbating the industry's slump.

This spells bad news for countries such as Botswana, whose economy is, in many ways, a one-stop shop. Diamonds make up 80% of the country's exports and contribute a quarter of its gross domestic product.

That money comes primarily from Debswana, whose ownership is split 50-50 between the government of Botswana and the South African mining giant De Beers. Between 2023 and 2025, Debswana's output in Botswana dropped 39%. Experts predict Botswana's diamond revenue in the fiscal year ending this September will be less

low China to launch a counterstrike before an enemy's first strike could even detonate. The U.S. and Russia both have this capability, known as “launch on warning,” as a legacy of the Cold War. It's widely regarded as the most dangerous nuclear posture because it requires quick, life-and-death decisions – and false alarms are common, experts say. In 2019, Russia confirmed it was working with China to develop an advanced missile attack early warning system. “Those systems mean that political leaders have only a few minutes to make the most consequential decision in human history,” says Dr. Lewis. “I'm definitely worried about China joining that club.”

Another concern is the orbital bombardment system that China tested in 2021, which would allow it to launch a nuclear warhead and strike with very little warning. “China could use this weapon to conduct surprise attacks on the American leadership or [its] nuclear command and control system,” says Dr. Zhao.

China is also focused on developing dual-capable forces – missiles that can deliver either nuclear warheads or conventional warheads. In wartime, ambiguity over whether an attack is nuclear or conventional “poses all kinds of problems for keeping the nuclear genie in the bottle,” says Dr. Lewis.

As China marches forward in expanding its nuclear arsenal, it has little interest in entering into talks about arms control or reducing nuclear risks. And the recent expiration of New START, which Beijing called “regrettable,” frees the U.S. and Russia to modernize and expand their own arsenals – further reducing international political pressure to restrain China.

Yet on a positive note, Ms. Gottemoeller says, Mr. Trump has endorsed U.S. nuclear experts to stay engaged with Russian counterparts. Igor Korotchenko, editor of the Moscow-based National Defense Magazine and a leading Russian military expert, says that Russia is ready to resume talks in the old format, or to find some formula for extending the New START limits. Russia's primary concern is Mr. Trump's desire to build a “Golden Dome” anti-missile shield, which would undermine the Russian deterrent and make any form of arms control obsolete, he says.

Moreover, President Trump will have four opportunities to meet with Mr. Xi this year. “There's a lot of opportunity in 2026 for the U.S. and Russia, and separately the U.S. and China, to come together and talk about reducing nuclear risks and improving nuclear controls,” says Ms. Gottemoeller.

■ *Fred Weir contributed to this story from Moscow.*

than half the historical average.

Cuts at Debswana, one of Botswana's largest private employers, fan out beyond the diamond industry. The company also runs schools, major hospitals, and even game parks in the country. Dimpho Selebe worked for 17 years as a teacher in a mine-run school in the town of Letlhakane, where he says his salary was double what teachers in the public school system earn. "I was there when Debswana was flourishing," he recalls. He flourished, too, sending his kids to good schools and buying himself a farm.

But as the mine cut its production, Mr. Selene saw the writing on the wall. Last year, when the company offered him a voluntary buyout, he decided to take it. Now, he is retraining to become a tour guide. "I don't want to remain idle," he says.

Over the last two years, Debswana has offered similar buyouts across its mines, hoping to shed about 10% of its workforce.

Meanwhile, its losses – along with those faced by smaller private companies – are already having major consequences for Botswana's bottom line. The country's economy shrunk by 3% in 2024, and that recession continued in 2025.

A country of small stones

The effects of declining diamond sales are now clearly visible in towns such as Jwaneng, which sprung up beside the mine here in the early 1980s.

The economy of Jwaneng – whose name means "place of small stones" in Tswana – orbits around the mine. In addition to mine workers themselves, many here make a living selling fruit, cellphone credit, or plates of chicken and salad outside its gates, or driving the grunting minibus taxis that ferry employees to and from work.

But Jwaneng has recently taken a series of knocks. In addition to losing employees to Debswana's voluntary buyouts, sections of the mine closed for part of 2025 to cut costs as demand for diamonds declined.

In June, Dikeledi Monnamotho took a voluntary buyout from her job as an electrical technician at the mine. Now, she works as a food vendor, a profession also tightly bound in the diamond industry's fortunes, and says she earns half her previous income. But with few other options, she has staked her future on a mining turnaround.

"I have hope that diamonds will sell again," she says simply.

Policy analyst and businessman Martin De Klerk Moatshe says whatever happens to the diamond market, Botswana needs to hedge its bets and develop a "skills and value-based economy." That would mean investing more in the country's world famous national parks, as well as manufacturing and agriculture.

Othusitse Malome hopes to find a future for himself beyond mining. He worked at the Jwaneng mine until his contract was terminated last year, a job that he says formed part of his identity. Mining allowed him to build his family a new house in their village, send his children to private school, and support a constellation of his siblings and other relatives.

"Working in a mine made me appreciate how diamonds changed our people's lives," Mr. Malome says.

Now, he is no longer able to send money home, and will soon move to the capital, Gaborone, about 85 miles east of Jwaneng. There, he plans to register the car he bought with his mine worker's salary as a taxi, and try to start over again. ■

PORT WASHINGTON, WIS.

As data centers rise, more communities are pushing back

Concerns about electricity bills and local impacts are fueling bipartisan opposition to the massive data centers that power AI and cloud services.

By Simon Montlake / Staff writer

Snow-dusted furrows etch the fields as trucks cart away mounds of dirt, day and night, to level the ground. Around the perimeter, blue signs mark the 672-acre site where, over the next two years, steel-framed buildings holding towers of computer servers will rise – part of a frenetic coast-to-coast drive to scale up AI processing power.

To Ted Neitzke, the mayor of Port Washington, this \$15 billion data center project is a huge win for this harbor town on the western shore of Lake Michigan. It will generate new tax revenue and hundreds of permanent jobs – not counting the construction workers and contractors already pouring in. Mr. Neitzke, who balances his part-time job as mayor with his work as chief executive of an education nonprofit, grew up in the city of about 13,000 when it was still a manufacturing hub for lawnmowers and snowblowers, before the factories moved away. Now, it's more of a bedroom community for Milwaukee, with a historic lighthouse and a summer tourist trade.

Lately, though, Port Washington has become something else: the epicenter of a backlash against the giant data centers that are mushrooming on available land all across Wisconsin. The controversy has engulfed Mr. Neitzke and his city.

"I didn't choose to be the face of data centers, AI, or energy [usage], but I was, because I'm the mayor," he says.

It's a fight flaring across the country, in red and blue states, from Oklahoma to Indiana to Pennsylvania, pitting big tech companies and their partners against local activists up in arms about the environmental and community impacts of data centers, as well as potential disruptions from the artificial intelligence technology they make possible. Power-hungry data centers are also being blamed for rising electricity prices. That issue was central to November's gubernatorial elections in New Jersey and Virginia, the latter of which has the largest concentration of data centers in the country.

It also helped Democrats in Georgia win two GOP-held seats on the state's utility regulatory committee in last year's special election. Legislators in Georgia are now considering several bills to regulate the data center industry, including its effects on electricity prices and the tax breaks it receives; one Democrat-sponsored bill would impose a one-year moratorium on new data center projects.

Democrats in the U.S. Senate are seeking to investigate data centers' impact on household rates. "Recent increases to consumers' utility bills are directly linked to the tech industry's data center buildout," wrote Sens. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, Chris Van Hollen of Maryland, and Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut in a December statement.

An October analysis by the Bank of America Institute found that rising demand for power for data centers and manufacturing facilities is already leading to higher utility bills for residential customers, and it predicts the trend will continue as more data centers come

online. Low-income households are disproportionately affected by higher utility rates, the analysis noted.

Lawmakers in Wisconsin recently passed Republican-authored legislation to regulate data centers, introducing protections for consumers when new capacity is added to the power grid. The bill would require any renewable energy facility that serves a data center to be on the same site. However, Gov. Tony Evers, a Democrat, is expected to veto it; Democrats in the legislature have drafted their own bill, which includes strict labor and environmental provisions.

Brad Tietz, a director of state policy for the Data Center Coalition, an industry group, says the bill that passed “misses the mark” in the regulation of power usage by mandating that solar farms be built alongside data centers. But he says the industry wants to work with lawmakers to “spur collaborative and sustainable data center development. Wisconsin is right for that opportunity, if folks want to allow it.”

Arrests of activists

In Wisconsin, as in other states, tussles over where the tech industry should build the data centers that undergird the digital economy, from cloud services to AI chatbots, are local and personal – and explosive. In Port Washington, council meetings have turned into shouting matches and led to arrests of activists who oppose construction of the data center.

Mayor Neitzke says he has done everything possible to share information and to allay residents’ concerns about power bills, water usage, air pollution, and wildlife protection. “Everyone who came to our council meetings, who would say, ‘This isn’t right, this isn’t fair,’ we would write it down. We would investigate it. And if we could control it, if it was within our control, we would do something,” he says.

None of this has mollified critics of the project, which is being built by Denver-based Vantage Data Centers and will be operated by Oracle for OpenAI. They question whether its long-term power demands can be met without raising costs for other users. They argue also that the city hasn’t been transparent and object to a tax-financing package that defrays Vantage’s upfront costs.

“This is corporate welfare for a project that doesn’t have a lot of benefits for this community,” says Michael Beaster, an engineer.

Mr. Beaster is running for an open seat on Port Washington’s council, a nonpartisan body, in spring elections scheduled for April.

While Mr. Beaster’s politics lean left, he and others say local opposition to the data center crosses party lines. Many conservatives are concerned, for example, about the risks of AI as a tool for surveillance. “This gets people riled up on both sides,” says Christine Le Jeune, another volunteer.

Ms. Le Jeune pushes back against charges that data center opponents are hypocrites when they organize protests on social media. “This is a hyperscale AI data center. It’s not for my Facebook cloud,” she says. (Cloud services are currently the largest use of U.S. data centers, but AI is growing fast as facilities come online.)

Meta, the parent company of Facebook, is building a \$1 billion data center in Beaver Dam, 50 miles west of Port Washington. South of Milwaukee, Microsoft is due to open this year the first phase of a giant data center in Mount Pleasant. The Mount Pleasant site had previously been set aside for Foxconn, the Taiwanese company that assembles iPhones, to build a manufacturing plant for 13,000 workers – a facility that, in 2018, President Donald Trump promised would be “the eighth wonder of the world.”

Foxconn later abandoned that project, and skeptics say AI data

centers could go the same way if AI company valuations collapse. Mr. Beaster says it’s unclear how Vantage could be held to account if it fails to fulfill its commitments to Port Washington.

New and upgraded transmission lines required

For now, construction crews are working around the clock to prepare the site. To supply the 1.3 gigawatts of power that the data center will need in its first phase, around 100 miles of new and upgraded transmission lines must be built. Clean Wisconsin, an advocacy group, calculates that the Port Washington and Mount Pleasant data centers combined will require power equal to 4.3 million homes, in a state with 2.8 million housing units.

Port Washington says Vantage is obligated to pay for these upgrades, and consumers should not face higher rates as a result. Indeed, Mr. Tietz says consumers might actually benefit, as demand for power is growing in general and not just from data centers. “We’re at a moment of time where, quite frankly, we haven’t built enough generation or transmission to meet the overall electrification needs,” he says.

Some Wisconsin communities have successfully blocked data center projects. After opposition to a proposed Microsoft data center grew in the village of Caledonia, the company said it would find a new site.

The campaign in Port Washington kicked into a higher gear in September after Charlie Berens, a Wisconsin comedian and influencer, railed against its data center, claiming that Wisconsin “was becoming a dumping ground” for Silicon Valley. That attracted statewide attention and drew outside activists to council meetings, including a rowdy session in December where Ms. Le Jeune was arrested after refusing to leave the chamber.

“We were besieged by people who do not live here,” complains Mr. Neitzke. (Ms. Le Jeune, who faces a misdemeanor charge, says the environmental impact goes beyond Port Washington, so nearby communities are right to be concerned.)

While Mayor Neitzke knows some residents aren’t happy about the data center, he says the debate has been distorted by misinformation on social media, which the city has to respond to, even when it’s already set the record straight. Rumors used to spread around town in days, not hours. “Social media just changes the game. All you do is chase false narratives,” he says.

In a restaurant near City Hall, retired shipping manager Vicki Benson is meeting a friend for lunch. She has mixed feelings about the data center. She worries newcomers will dilute Port Washington’s small-town feel and doesn’t believe Vantage’s promises. “Our utility bills will go up,” she predicts.

But she recognizes that data centers bring economic benefits. And she rejects opponents’ claims that Port Washington deliberately kept residents in the dark about the project. “The information was there. People just weren’t paying attention,” she says.

Mr. Beaster, of Great Lakes Neighbors United, admits that he used to follow state and national politics more closely than what’s happening on his own doorstep. Now, he’s running for a council seat and trying to engage more locally. If elected, “I’m going to try to be constructive and find creative solutions,” he says. “Not just say no to everything.” ■

100,000

Tons of radioactive waste that are temporarily being stored at nuclear plants and other sites across the United States as the country seeks to boost its nuclear power capacity. The U.S. administration is asking states to volunteer space for permanent geological repositories for the nuclear waste.

23

The median percentage of adults across 107 countries who said the economy was the most important problem in their country. Together with the 3% of respondents who cited affording food and shelter as their main concern, economic issues account for 26% of global responses.

243

Million gallons of wastewater that surged into the Potomac River in late January, 8 miles away from the White House, due to a ruptured sewage pipe. It will take an estimated four to six weeks to clean up the spill.

763

Dogs across nine regions in Ukraine that were studied by scientists and found to have changed from exposure to the war with Russia. Formerly pets, the dogs, now on the street, had shifted to more closely resemble those in the wild. The most dramatic changes were observed in dogs on the front line.

1

The number of bowling alleys in Somalia. The singular alley opened in 2025 and is a part of the shift in Somalia toward a slow economic revival as security improves, families feel safe going out, and Somalis from the diaspora return.

— **Audrey Thibert** / Staff writer

Sources: Reuters, Gallup, NPR, The New York Times, The Associated Press

THE EXPLAINER

A guide to the Epstein files: Will any new charges result?

The release of documents has stirred attention, but much of the evidence is inconclusive. The challenge is to sift facts from speculation.

By **Henry Gass, Cameron Pugh, and Victoria Hoffmann** Staff writers

The recent release of more than 3 million pages of documents related to criminal investigations into Jeffrey Epstein is shedding new light on the elite network surrounding the disgraced financier and convicted sex offender, and raising questions about whether new prosecutions will emerge.

News organizations and private citizens alike are continuing to uncover new information from the massive document dump, despite redactions that have left a complete picture elusive.

Mr. Epstein, who died in jail in 2019 in what was officially ruled a suicide, is alleged to have run a sex-trafficking ring catering not just to himself but also potentially to some of the world's most powerful people. More than 1,000 survivors of his alleged crimes have been identified since investigations into Mr. Epstein began in the mid-2000s.

The only person to have been sentenced to prison for Epstein-related crimes is Ghislaine Maxwell, his longtime associate, who is serving a 20-year sentence for her role alongside Mr. Epstein in sex-trafficking operations. Some prominent individuals have faced reputational and employment consequences because of revelations in the files.

Demands for the full release of the Epstein files grew in recent years from survivors and lawmakers in both parties. Congress passed legislation this past November forcing the Justice Department to begin releasing files in January. The department had argued against a full release, citing privacy concerns for survivors and unindicted third parties.

Critics say the recent release still falls short, pointing to heavy redactions and the notable absence of certain Trump administration officials, including Attorney General Pam Bondi and FBI Director Kash Patel.

The release has also been accompanied by a spike in unverified and false allegations on social media, often stemming from misinterpretations of emails or AI-generated fakes.

In many ways, instead of providing clarity and transparency, the Epstein files release appears to have deepened public mistrust of government and further fanned the flames of conspiracy.

Q: Is there anything incriminating in the new files?

The Epstein files include documents from three federal investigations of Mr. Epstein, documents that courts have kept mostly sealed since the early 2000s.

Two leading sponsors of the Epstein Files Transparency Act, Republican Rep. Thomas Massie of Kentucky and Democratic Rep. Ro Khanna of California, have said that unredacted versions of the files reveal six new “likely incriminated” men.

Why the files are mistrusted. Survivors and members of Congress have criticized the Justice Department for what they describe as heavy-handed redactions of the files. One group of survivors described the redactions as “abnormal and extreme.”

The favorable plea deal federal prosecutors gave Mr. Epstein back in 2008, his extensive connections to men in positions of power, the unusual circumstances surrounding his death, and the heavily redacted nature of the publicly released files have collectively reinforced a widespread mistrust in the federal government's handling of the case. Are powerful people being protected? Was there a cover-up?

Why prosecution is difficult. An unsigned memo from the Justice Department and the FBI last year said that, after an “exhaustive” and “systematic” internal review, the agencies “did not uncover evidence that could predicate an investigation against uncharged third parties.” There was “no incriminating ‘client list’” and “no credible evidence” that Mr. Epstein had “blackmailed prominent individuals.”

Even if incriminating evidence is uncovered, successful prosecutions could still be a challenge. Sexual assault cases are notoriously difficult to prosecute at the best of times. In the Epstein case, concerning potentially decades-old events, it becomes even harder, and might be impossible if the statute of limitations forecloses certain

new criminal charges.

The Trump administration last year said there won't be additional prosecutions.

"The delay makes it so much harder," says David Aronberg, who served as state attorney for Palm Beach County in Florida from 2013 to 2025. "Memories fade, witnesses die, evidence spoils."

Q: How do the files connect with prominent figures?

The documents include references to and communications with many prominent figures, including Bill Gates, Elon Musk, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, Bill and Hillary Clinton, and President Donald Trump, among others. Being mentioned is not by itself an indication of criminal wrongdoing, however.

Some political figures in Europe have left their jobs over the surfacing of Epstein connections, and Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, brother of Britain's King Charles III, lost his title of prince and his taxpayer-funded mansion.

Donald Trump. Mr. Trump appears in the released files thousands of times. Many of the references are innocuous. Last year, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that, in 2003, Mr. Trump banned Mr. Epstein from Mar-a-Lago after a spa worker complained that Mr. Epstein pressured her for sex.

On Feb. 10, the *Miami Herald* reported that, in July 2006, as the initial investigation into Mr. Epstein was getting underway, Mr. Trump called then-Palm Beach Police Chief Michael Reiter and said, "Thank goodness you're stopping him; everyone has known he's been doing this." He also called Ms. Maxwell "evil." The revelation appears to contradict Mr. Trump's previous claims that he did not know about Mr. Epstein's criminal activities. The *Herald* based its report on an interview the FBI conducted with Mr. Reiter in 2019, a summary of which was released by the Justice Department this year.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said she did not know whether the 2006 call with the police chief occurred and emphasized Mr. Trump's split from Mr. Epstein. "Unlike many other people who are named in these files, President Trump cut off his relationship with Jeffrey Epstein and was honest and transparent about that for years and years."

The documents show the FBI received tips alleging, among other things, sexual misconduct by Mr. Trump, but the agency and Justice Department have cast doubt on the credibility of these reports.

Bill and Hillary Clinton. Speculation has also swirled about Mr. Epstein's relationship with the Clintons. Like Mr. Trump, Mr. Clinton socialized with Mr. Epstein in the 1990s and 2000s, and earlier document releases have included several photos of Mr. Clinton with Mr. Epstein and others. The former president has said he stopped speaking to Mr. Epstein before his first indictment and that he had no knowledge of his criminal activity.

As this article went to press, the Clintons were preparing for scheduled closed-door depositions to Congress. Democrats and Republicans alike had voted to hold them in contempt when they refused congressional subpoenas demanding they testify. The Clintons have asked that the hearings be held publicly.

Recently, *The New York Times* reported that Ms. Maxwell played a key role in setting up the Clinton Global Initiative, an arm of the Clinton Foundation.

Q: What do survivors of Mr. Epstein's crimes want?

Calls for justice and transparency from survivors of Mr. Epstein's accused crimes have echoed throughout Washington.

But they say the congressionally mandated "Epstein Library"

now on the Justice Department website is far from perfect. Slapdash redactions improperly identified and included personal information about almost 100 survivors, turning their lives "upside down," their lawyers wrote in a Feb. 1 letter to two federal judges. They also shielded some Epstein associates. Survivors are also urging Ms. Bondi to release more than 3 million additional files they claim are still being withheld in violation of the Epstein Files Transparency Act.

On Feb. 10, the brother and sister-in-law of Virginia Giuffre, one of the first survivors to go public, who died by suicide last year, joined congressional Democrats in introducing "Virginia's Law." The proposed bill would eliminate the statute of limitations for adult victims to file civil lawsuits, opening up legal recourse to many survivors. ■

PEOPLE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

LAHORE, PAKISTAN

Via camel, rickshaw, whatever it takes, Alif Laila Book Bus Society reaches children

A Pakistani nonprofit brings books where they are needed – upending the belief that reading is reserved for the country's elite.

By Hasan Ali / Contributor

No sooner has the motorized purple rickshaw turned into the alleyway than a girl in a headscarf begins to run from door to door.

"Come outside!" she shouts, with a jump and a skip.

Within moments, the vehicle with a unicorn and a dragon painted on its back is surrounded by neighborhood children.

Rickshaws are a ubiquitous sight in Lahore, a sprawling Pakistani metropolis of 13 million people. Whether parked in alleys or wobbling through bazaars, they form an essential part of the city's chaos. But with the arrival of this particular rickshaw in Bihari Ahata – a working-class neighborhood in Lahore's teeming center – Alif Laila Book Bus Society announces itself with unusual aplomb.

When the driver opens the back door, the reason for the children's delight becomes clear. The interior is lined with shelves of colorful picture books.

"The thinking was that if children couldn't come to the library, the library had to go to them," says Basarat Kazim, now in her fifth decade as the head of Alif Laila, the nonprofit that sponsors the mobile library.

"A tremendous boost"

Alif Laila was founded in the 1970s by American expatriate Juanita Baker, who created a library for children out of a decommissioned bus donated by the local government. It was only under the stewardship of Mrs. Kazim, who became president of the nonprofit in 1985, that Alif Laila began to operate traveling libraries.

These days, the libraries have grown into a nationwide phe-

nomenon, bringing books to children who sorely need them – and upending the belief among many Pakistanis that reading is a pastime reserved for the elite.

Tahir Mehmood is the principal of a school in Nabipura, one of Lahore's poorest neighborhoods. Most of the students' parents are domestic workers for well-to-do households.

"These are kids whose parents can't even afford to buy the notebooks they need for class, let alone books to read," he says. "When Alif Laila sends its buses and rickshaws to this area, the children become very excited, and it gives them a tremendous boost in their learning."

His sentiments are echoed by Sadia Bibi, a third-grade teacher at the school.

"My students have become much better at reading because of Alif Laila," she says. "I can tell the difference."

Learning becomes fun

Pakistan, a country of approximately 250 million people, has a literacy rate of around 60%, the second-lowest in South Asia, after Afghanistan. Education funding often falls below 4% of gross domestic product – the United Nations' minimum recommended benchmark – and an estimated 25 million Pakistani children don't attend school, according to UNICEF.

There is also a large geographical divide in the literacy rate, with rural Pakistanis lagging 22 percentage points behind their urban counterparts.

As Alif Laila has expanded, it has increasingly sought creative ways to bring books to children in challenging locations. In remote parts of Sindh and Baluchistan provinces, for instance, the non-profit frequently uses camels to transport books. Two of its mobile libraries, meanwhile, are housed in boats.

But libraries are just one part of the nonprofit's work. In one of its buses, called the Techno Savari, the interior is kitted out with robots and gadgets. The traveling science lab goes from school to school offering demonstrations in electronics and other technologies.

"What we're trying to do is to give these kids the sort of exposure to STEM-based learning that they're not getting in their schools," says Muhammad Kashif, a staff member at Alif Laila.

Twelve-year-old Mehtab Waris is one of these children. On the day a Monitor contributor visited, she watched a demonstration on the solar system in the Techno Savari bus.

"When I grow up, I want to be an engineer," she says. "The things I see here make learning fun."

Opening doors

The nonprofit also trains teachers and publishes books of its own, in addition to hosting a brick-and-mortar library near the site in Lahore where its first bus was parked starting in the 1970s.

Muhammad Hussain Alam remembers visiting that library as a child from a lower-middle-class background in the '80s. Now a professor of history at Government College Township, Lahore, he credits Alif Laila with making him the person he is.

"To find a place with so many books and so many things to learn was like a door opening up to a different world," he says. "It put wings on my imagination."

Mrs. Kazim says such stories bring tears to her eyes. But what makes her proudest is when she sees the concept of a mobile library being adopted by other nonprofits.

"Ours was the first rickshaw library. Eighteen organizations are now running rickshaw libraries," she says.

"What we want is for this movement to spread throughout Pakistan. Because the work we have done does not belong to us. It belongs to the children of Pakistan." ■

REPORTERS ON THE JOB

BOSTON

I often forget I have an unfamiliar accent. When I interviewed British songwriter Billy Bragg, he said, "I can't quite make out your accent, but it's not American." I thought I'd be the one asking Mr. Bragg about his voice. He sings in a pronounced East London cadence. I explained that I grew up in South Africa, then lived in Britain, and am now a U.S. resident. My voice is an unusual amalgam of three different strains of English. I quipped, "Not even Meryl Streep can mimic my voice." Mr. Bragg laughed. A bonding moment between two men accustomed to sometimes requiring translation. ■



Stephen Humphries

ALICANTE, SPAIN

When my plane touched down in the port city of Alicante, I realized I'd been here before. But unlike then, when I had my Spanish husband in tow, this time I'm alone, interviewing locals about a new immigration law. Even when I understand everything, I get lots of furrowed brows as I use the wrong verb tense, and mix up *por* and *para*. Interviews always involve trust, but when you haven't mastered a language, that trust comes in different forms – an understanding smile, an embarrassed shrug. When I interview people who are hesitant to speak, my wobbly Spanish becomes unexpectedly disarming. ■



Colette Davidson

PORT WASHINGTON, WIS.

Campaigners who oppose a massive data center here are collecting signatures to recall the city's mayor. I planned to join them in late January so I could gauge the mood. But it was so cold, with subzero wind chills, that nobody went door-knocking that weekend. Instead I met the activists in a café. The next day was bitterly cold, and nobody was out to talk to. Thankfully, I had already asked the mayor for the name of a popular local diner. There, I found residents willing to discuss an issue that has divided the community. As long as we were inside and out of the wind, that is. ■



Simon Montlake

DHAKA, BANGLADESH

I was in Dhaka in early February reporting on the lack of women nominated in Bangladesh's elections. I had an interview with Mamunul Haque, the leader of a hard-line Islamic party. At the party headquarters, we were shown into a room and served tea while we waited. After half an hour, we learned that Mr. Haque was talking to women campaign volunteers at a community center. Since I wanted to ask him about women in politics, this was fitting. At the community center, we saw him address hundreds of women who were hidden from view behind floor-to-ceiling sheets. This image said as much as anything he told me in the interview about the role of women in his political sphere. ■

Apollo to Artemis: US launches a ‘third era’ of space travel

NASA plans to send a crewed mission around the moon in an initial step toward building a permanent presence in outer space.

By Henry Gass / Staff writer

The Artemis program’s Space Launch System has a maximum speed of more than 24,000 miles per hour, but it still isn’t fast enough to escape comparisons to Apollo 11.

Yet, those preparing the SLS (to use its NASA-designated acronym) have loftier ambitions than matching the Apollo program in taking humans to the moon and returning them safely. The Artemis program – which uses the SLS as its main launch vehicle – aims to both return Americans to the moon and begin creating a long-term human presence in outer space.

Artemis is NASA’s first venture in what can be described as the third era of human space travel. The 1960s race between the United States and the Soviet Union to land a man on the moon is viewed as the first era.

It ended with a definitive American victory when Neil Armstrong planted the U.S. flag on the lunar surface in July 1969. The second era – embodied by the Space Shuttle and the International Space Station (ISS) – heralded a focus on reusability as well as cooperation between nations and the private sector.

This third era is a blend of the previous two. Both the U.S. and China are pushing to return humans to the moon by the end of this decade. Meanwhile, international coalitions and private aerospace companies are sketching out ambitious visions for a lunar-centered space economy that can advance technology on Earth and help fuel (literally) further exploration into deep space.

The Artemis program “is huge, it is historic. But it’s also important that it is not a flags-and-footprint thing anymore,” says Jan Osburg, a senior engineer at RAND.

“We have the technology, we should have the management capability and the political will to make it something that lasts beyond just a handful of missions,” he adds.

A new space race?

NASA aims to launch the Artemis II mission as soon as March 6. The roughly 10-day mission aims to fly four astronauts around the moon and back to Earth, testing the SLS, the Orion spacecraft, and every other engineering and communications system that NASA and its private partners have built for the Artemis program.

The mission will take astronauts beyond low-Earth orbit for the first time in 50 years, and the four-person crew will include the first woman, the first person of color, and the first Canadian to fly around the moon. (The Artemis name is a nod to other NASA eras: In Greek mythology, Artemis is the twin sister of Apollo.)

This year’s mission follows Artemis I in 2022, which performed an uncrewed orbital flight around the moon. The Artemis III mission, tentatively scheduled for 2028, is when NASA hopes to land humans on the moon for the first time in more than half a century.

The 2028 timeline is notable. China has been making steady progress with its own lunar exploration program, the Chang’e Project, and aims for a moon landing by 2030. Not much information comes out from the China National Space Administration (CNSA), but observers say that Chang’e is enjoying steady progress, aided by the country’s autocratic government being able to fund the program as it sees fit.

It has all the hallmarks of a new space race. For NASA, that might not be a bad thing. “Portraying this as a new space race, like the 1960s, can be an effective political argument that frees up money from the White House and Congress despite demands to reduce the deficit,” says Marcia Smith, a veteran space policy analyst. “I’m not sure it’s actually true, but it’s an effective argument politically and financially at this time.”

Some in the space exploration community say a longer-term outlook is needed. Getting to the moon first might have symbolic significance, but this era of space travel will be defined by achieving a long-term human presence beyond low-Earth orbit. In that context, some experts say, rushing might be the wrong approach.

“Sustained human presence on the moon is an ultra-marathon, not a sprint,” says Bruce McClintock, head of the Space Enterprise Initiative at RAND.

“A century from now, in my view, nobody is really going to care who got there first.”

Mining the moon

In January 2025, Elon Musk – the billionaire founder of private space company SpaceX – described the moon as “a distraction” from Mars.

Just over a year later, however, he has changed his tune.

“SpaceX has already shifted focus to building a self-growing city on the Moon,” he wrote in a social media post on Feb. 8. “The overriding priority is securing the future of civilization and the Moon is faster.”

A stated long-term goal of NASA is to “expand permanent human presence beyond low-Earth orbit.” Artemis is intended to lay the groundwork for that permanent human presence. This government-led effort, NASA hopes, could lead to a new “space economy” on and around the moon.

There is some skepticism, however.

“The idea of a sustained presence on the moon is orders of magnitude more complicated than just sending somebody to the moon,” says Mr. McClintock.

This process is scheduled to begin with Artemis IV and the construction of a small moon-orbiting space station, known as Lunar Gateway. It will allow astronauts to live for extended periods in space, conduct scientific experiments, more easily access the lunar surface, and stage for missions to Mars and into deep space.

The longer-term hope is that a space station orbiting the moon will help support a permanent lunar base. In turn, as Mr. Musk’s dream of a “Moon city” illustrates, this presence could lead to private industry establishing a new economy beyond low-Earth orbit.

Most experts agree that it won’t happen overnight, however.

“I don’t think people are really comprehending the difficulty,” says Ms. Smith, the space policy analyst.

The lunar south pole is attracting lots of scientific and commercial interest, for example. It is believed to hold large amounts of water ice, a resource that is chemically different from ice on Earth and could be vital for human missions and settlements.

“But this ice is in permanently shadowed craters ... and these

craters are at minus-250 degrees [Fahrenheit], so mining that ice [will] be extraordinarily difficult,” Ms. Smith says.

This dynamic has already unfolded in low-Earth orbit, which extends to about 1,200 miles above the planet’s surface. From the 1980s through the 2010s, governments developed efficient ways to launch into this area of space. This enabled the construction and continued maintenance of the ISS.

Launches to low-Earth orbit, including the space station, are now routine. In 2025, SpaceX launched more than 120 Starlink communication satellites, averaging one launch every few days. The company’s Starlink-based internet service is now its main revenue driver.

But what helps make these services profitable is the relative affordability of accessing low-Earth orbit. The moon is 100 times farther away, making it much more expensive and dangerous for companies to reach. Discussions so far have focused on ventures such as mining the moon for critical minerals, as well as building private space stations for research, manufacturing, and tourism.

Recent surveys have found the moon to be rich in resources, including minerals, water ice (chemically complex deposits that could be turned into rocket fuel), and helium-3 (which could be used as fuel for nuclear fusion). The lunar economy could be worth around \$170 billion over the next two decades, according to a 2021 PricewaterhouseCoopers analysis. NASA has partnered with a variety of commercial space companies in the hopes of stimulating a self-sustaining economy on and around the moon.

The discussions are almost entirely hypothetical. Few private companies have consistently launched a rocket beyond low-Earth orbit.

“Space is a very, very hostile environment, and it’s chokingly expensive,” says Joan Johnson-Freese, a senior fellow with Women in International Security and a former professor at the U.S. Naval War College. “I don’t think we can say much about a potential space economy until we have routine access to the moon. Otherwise, it’s aspirational rather than real.”

Preserving unity

When humanity first began venturing into space, only the United States and the Soviet Union were involved. That has changed dramatically over the past six decades. More than 70 nations had space programs as of 2023, and international collaboration has defined human space exploration since the space race.

Astronauts from 26 countries have visited the ISS. Key partners on Lunar Gateway include the European, Japanese, Canadian, and United Arab Emirates space agencies.

NASA has also been gathering global signatories to its Artemis Accords. Drafted in 2020, the accords lay out “best practices to enhance the governance of the civil exploration and use of outer space.” Sixty-one nations had signed on to the agreement as of January. Two notable exceptions: China and Russia.

China is looking for 50 countries to join its International Lunar Research Station project, a scientific outpost planned for the lunar south pole. Russia is China’s main partner on the project, but other nations have signed on as well. Seventeen countries and international organizations have joined, the Chinese government announced last year.

Both programs describe themselves as science-focused. But as the U.S. and China advance their respective moon missions, the geopolitical undercurrents are undeniable.

“They are deliberately trying to pull undecided nations into

their orbit,” says Mr. Osburg, the RAND engineer.

“That doesn’t necessarily mean there has to be conflict between those two,” he adds. “Hopefully, as lunar exploration is going to take place, there will be cooperation between these two different systems and organizations.”

How meaningful these multinational agreements are in the long term remains to be seen. But recent shifts in the global international order are worrying members of the space community. For example, as tensions between it and the U.S. have heightened amid threats of tariffs and annexation, Canada has strengthened its relationship with China.

As America recalibrates its leadership role, there are concerns that changes on Earth could have ripple effects in outer space. And that could have consequences for every nation aiming for the stars.

Both China and Russia have had spacecraft hit by space debris recently, for example, and space debris is only expected to become a bigger problem in the coming years.

“Things like space debris can only be dealt with on an international basis,” says Dr. Johnson-Freese. “We’ve had that international cooperation in the past. How long it can continue, I think, is a big question.”

For now, with the Artemis program funded by Congress through 2032, the U.S. is a leader in returning humans to the moon. After one launch delay, Artemis II is hoping to lift off in early March. A successful lap around the moon would represent one small step toward returning to the footprints first left by Apollo 11.

John Logsdon was at Cape Kennedy that July morning in 1969. He saw the Saturn V rocket light up, and he heard the roar as it climbed through a blue sky toward the moon.

It was exhilarating, recalls Dr. Logsdon, a professor emeritus at George Washington University and founder of its Space Policy Institute. No Artemis launch will compare, he adds, but he is excited for the U.S. to go back.

“Going the second time is never going to have the impact of going the first time,” he says. “But if we’re going to go into space, we should explore, we should go beyond Earth orbit.” ■

EDITORIALS

Mending the vestiges of jihadism

Liberated from a dictatorship 15 months ago, Syrians are trying to unify their pivotal Middle East nation. A settlement after the government’s January attack on separatist Kurdish areas has brought some calm. But the clash also put a new focus on an old problem: what to do with former fighters of the Islamic State group and their families?

While ISIS’ self-declared caliphate in Syria and neighboring Iraq was defeated in 2019, pockets of fighters remain active in Syria. These – and some 20 prison camps housing ISIS family members – are cause for concern in the West.

In February, the United States launched multiple airstrikes on suspected ISIS strongholds. And governments and analysts worry that the camps are hotbeds for fomenting radicalism. Of the estimated 50,000 prisoners, approximately 8,000 – including women and children – are citizens of countries other than Syria and Iraq.

Iraq and Central Asian nations have brought home several thousand nationals from the camps. But others such as Britain, France,

and the Netherlands have been slow to do so, fearing the returnees would bring radicalism back with them.

U.S. officials argue that return is essential for long-term global security. NPR reported that the U.S. has urged that ISIS-affiliated women and children be reunited with family in their home countries, calling it a “high priority” and the “only durable solution.”

Reintegrating innocent children is “fully possible,” a grandfather of several repatriated minors in Sweden told Human Rights Watch. “My grandchildren are evidence of this,” he said, adding, “All children should ... get a new chance in life.”

Shifting attitudes in the Middle East support a more hopeful, less fearful expectation for the future: There, both civilians and religious leaders are calling for a separation of faith from politics – and for democracy over autocracy.

A recent Arab Barometer survey found a majority of Arabs prefer democracy, which they “conceive of ... as dignity, prioritizing social and economic outcomes.” A 2023 Cambridge University study found “a nuanced view” in the region of the relationship of Islam to the state. “Citizens can desire formal recognition for religion without supporting religious leaders’ direct involvement [in governance],” it said.

In January, the secretary-general of the Muslim World League spoke out against “exploiting religious texts as tools to ignite unjust wars or to deny legitimate rights.”

“True religious leaders are not spokespeople for power,” said Sheikh Dr. Mohammed Alissa. “Rather, they are guardians of virtue and justice, and advocates of dialogue and peace.” ■

A new climate norm: Less carbon, continued growth

Despite vastly different populations and governing systems, the Eastern European nation of Romania and Asian behemoth China share something in common: Both have a history of extensive industrial pollution. And, recently, both have managed to grow their economies while reducing carbon emissions.

According to new data, China’s “carbon intensity” (emissions divided by gross domestic product) fell by 12% from 2020 to 2025. But it remains the world’s biggest carbon emitter, with a nearly 33% share.

Romania, on the other hand, “has decoupled economic growth from pollution faster than anywhere else in Europe, and perhaps even the world,” The Guardian reported last month. From 1990 to 2023, its carbon intensity fell by 88%, and current emissions are 0.2% of the world total. It was one of Europe’s most polluted countries when communist rule ended in 1989, and before democracy took hold.

“Control of corruption, political stability, and regulatory quality reduced [Romania’s] pollution in the long-run,” concluded a research study of the transformative years from 1996 to 2019. Another study from 2007 onward – when Romania joined the European Union – found that more access to renewable energy sources and tech further reduced emissions.

Romania’s trajectory mirrors that of other Western democracies – where private investment and market forces are balanced by government oversight. From 2000 to 2023, per capita GDP in the United States rose 35%, while per capita carbon dioxide emissions fell 29%. And

Germany, the United Kingdom, and France also recorded per capita GDP gains of around 20% with emissions declines of 30% to 40%.

Governing systems that enable innovation and investment have contributed to these gains, supporting what a Wall Street Journal article described as a shift from “climate catastrophism” to “a less strident but more sustainable climate realism, focused on innovation and the commercialization of low-carbon technologies.”

Many countries continue to invest in fossil fuels, even as they seek to improve efficiency, explore new technologies, and reduce negative impacts. Data trends confirm that these aims are not mutually exclusive. A balanced approach can yield economic *and* environmental dividends. ■

Africa’s opportunity for minerals mastery

Nearly 150 years ago, European rivalries set off a “Scramble for Africa” that led to a century of colonial rule – and a legacy of dependency on foreign aid and technology.

Now, booming global demand for rare earth elements and minerals has set off another scramble toward the continent. But this time, Africa’s sovereign governments have the opportunity to steer the interaction toward priorities that increase benefits to their citizens through less lopsided investment terms.

“Africa is no longer merely a supplier, but central to global mineral diplomacy,” according to Shahrukh Wani, an analyst at the London School of Economics’ International Growth Centre. The interest of external players, he pointed out, “brings leverage [for Africa], but only if it is managed with purpose.”

A global mining conference in South Africa last month highlighted the potential for African nations to act in partnership in their extractive industries. Thousands of government, industry, and investment officials from around the world attended. The United States sent a large delegation.

Economies are competing for access to critical minerals used in smartphones, electric vehicles, and computing. Africa’s estimated reserves include cobalt (55% of known world deposits), manganese (nearly 48% of global supply), platinum (90%), graphite, copper, nickel, and lithium.

Referencing rising resource tensions and the conference theme – “Stronger Together: Progress Through Partnerships” – South Africa’s minerals minister, Gwede Mantashe, observed: “To us, this is not merely a slogan it is a strategic imperative for Africa to act collectively, speak in one voice ... in our engagement with global powers and investors.”

Unifying around fair rules

One effort to shape unified approaches took place last June, as African leaders gathered in Morocco to discuss financial autonomy and accountability. Corruption and inefficient rules and infrastructure have long constrained growth across Africa.

Sudanese British businessman and philanthropist Mo Ibrahim, whose foundation hosted the event, called for “build[ing] solutions from within.” And Pedro Pires, former president of Cape Verde, stressed the need for having “confidence in your own institutions” to effectively manage national resources.

A recent regional “critical minerals framework” calls for grow-

ing and spreading mining and processing activities across different African countries. It also highlights the importance of being able to operate “under strong and fair rules.”

The current flurry of cross-continental discussions and global attention signals an opportunity for African nations to put their commitment to rule-based governance into practice.

As Dr. Ibrahim told colleagues in June, “It is for us to take responsibility and put in place the fundamentals we need.” ■

READERS RESPOND

Protect vulnerable place-names

‘Ano‘ai (greetings) from Hawaii. It was a great pleasure to see the lovely photos and story “In Hawaii, it’s the height of delight,” about Diamond Head State Monument, in the Jan. 19 issue of the Monitor Weekly. The Hawaiian name for this landmark is Lē‘ahi. A simple notation of this would have been helpful.

Hawaiian cultural identity is being manifested in sincere efforts to restore and preserve Hawaiian place-names. The use of native place-names in publications such as the Monitor could aid global Indigenous peoples’ efforts to protect vulnerable place-names that have been replaced by colonizers. Please encourage your photographers and writers to consider this.

Sally Jo Manea
Kapaa, Kauai, Hawaii

A spotlight on the truth in Ukraine

I enjoyed the year-end photo-essays in the Dec. 29 and Jan. 5 issue of the Monitor Weekly. One photo by Scott Peterson made me catch my breath. The shot was of Bogdana Zhupanyna, nine months pregnant, her head bowed in a weary silhouette against the light pouring in from one side of her apartment in Kyiv, Ukraine – exposed after a drone strike. Fighting back tears, I was grateful to Mr. Peterson for keeping it real, a candid exposition of the savagery driving Vladimir Putin’s determination to bring Ukraine back into the Russian orbit, or driving a depravity to destroy it. Thanks for speaking the truth about this in a space where the human heart dwells without words.

Keith Howard
Arvada, Colorado

THE HOME FORUM

Why libraries have a hold on me

A book lover returns to the timeless pleasure of getting lost amid the stacks and stumbling on new treasures.

Time was, children, if you wanted a library book, you had to go to the library. The actual physical library building. You located your book in the card catalog. Then you rowed through the stacks until you chased it down by its Dewey decimal number. And since you were already there, you might cruise through those stacks just to see whether some-

thing interesting popped up.

I was at the library the very day the card catalog was hauled away. I was barely 40 years old but had a full-blown case of premature curmudgeonry. This was a terrible betrayal. It was as though the ancient Greeks had ousted their oracle. But I’m over it. Now, the library is a place where people go to get warm. The rest of us are online. We can put a hold on a book, and they’ll even mail it to us for free if we want. It’s like shopping, or getting food, or banking – there’s no need to pry yourself out of your comfy chair.

But I enjoy the starch of virtue I get from walking to the library to pick up my book. The space devoted to holds is almost as big as the rest of the stacks now. They don’t have as many books out on the main bookshelves anymore. It feels like an orphanage for books nobody wants to put a hold on.

I’m certain the books I order gossip about me in the hold limbo. The nonfiction sneers at the genre lit, and the literary fiction sneers at everything. They’ve got time; they can be there awhile. When I put a book on hold, the library usually informs me that I’m No. 257 in line for 22 copies. So, I already know other people want to read that book, too, and since everything is done on the honor system now and there are no overdue fines, I have to try really hard to get the little princesses read and returned.

That’s not my strong suit. For someone who takes to wordage like an otter takes to water, I’m a remarkably slow reader. I hardly ever sit in a chair and read. I read in bed. That’ll get me five pages in before I fall asleep, and I won’t remember them the next night.

And for the past few years, I have – more than once – tried to return a book to a library that was no longer open. Thanks to the generosity of Portland, Oregon, taxpayers who can’t pass up a library or parks levy, our neighborhood libraries are getting a makeover. Some of them might even be retrofitted to withstand the big Cascadia subduction zone earthquake that the geologists have penciled in for us.

Five years ago, my local branch closed down, and the suggested replacement added a mile to my walk. Then that one closed, and the county arranged for a pop-up branch in a tiny room of a college campus, where the staff was lonely and eager to help out and recommend things. I loved that little gem, but last year it closed for good, and I was directed to a whole different branch. I’m sure there was an announcement made, but I never seemed to find out until I walked a book back and saw the sign on the door. I can adjust. I don’t take these things personally.

The other day, I returned a book to this latest entry in Library Bingo, and had nothing to pick up. So I browsed the actual physical shelves like a caveman. Honestly, what’s next? Picking live food off trees?

Anyway, there was a novel I hadn’t read, by an author I admire! I checked it out and sneaked away as though I’d found a diamond ring in a dark alley. I started reading it that night.

It was not good. This author had won the Pulitzer Prize, but not for this sad little opus. Still, I gave it every chance. Maybe it would redeem itself on the last page.

It did not.

And it was almost overdue. But they weren’t hounding me for it. Apparently, word was out: Nobody else wanted to read it, either. And, of course, when I went to return it, the library was closed. The sign directed me to the original location, 3 miles from home. Renovations were complete.

It was gorgeous. Spacious, friendly, and apparently ready for

anything plate tectonics could throw at it. There was art; there was light; there were beanbag chairs, community rooms, large windows. In a world where facts are sometimes manufactured to order and the truth can twist out of reach, there is comfort and serenity in a library that stays put.

I returned my book, four weeks late. No one's in line to check it out. I gave it a pat of encouragement. "Find a shelf, and make yourself at home," I said to my book as I dropped it in the slot. "You're not going anywhere for a good long time."

It's my home now, too.

– Murr Brewster

POETRY

GRANDCHILDREN

*They are a late gift
The day after Christmas
When you thought
The party over.
They arrive unwrapped
And unexpected.
You seem to know
One another
Like childhood friends
You haven't seen for years.*

*It's surprising how we feel
Later in life
When given the chance
To play with toddlers,
To walk holding their hand,
Or read a silly book
Or push a swing.
When they laugh
We get a second wind.*

– Ed Meek

A CHRISTIAN SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE

Every child – under God's care

Holding a tiny infant in my arms, my heart was filled with tenderness. As foster parents to newborns, my husband and I were committed to caring for each one in the face of an uncertain future.

With birth parents unsettled or unavailable, our foster babies seemed like little orphans. So my tenderness was sometimes mixed with fear. How could even the most well-meaning decision-makers guarantee these little ones safety and happiness?

What helped reassure me was the truth that God is everyone's Father-Mother. Father is a common name for God in the Bible. For instance, Psalms 68:5 promises, "A father of the fatherless ... is God in his holy habitation." And Isaiah 66:13 compares God to a mother: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." Christian Science combines "Father" and "Mother" to describe God's entire nature.

"Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures" by Mary

Baker Eddy, founder of The Christian Science Monitor, says, "Love, the divine Principle, is the Father and Mother of the universe, including man" (p. 256). This comprehensive statement refers to man generically – women and children as well as men. Later in Science and Health, Mrs. Eddy's primary work on Christian Science, she adds, "Father-Mother is the name for Deity, which indicates His tender relationship to His spiritual creation" (p. 332).

No child can be displaced, rejected, or orphaned from the care of our one divine Parent. Christ Jesus assured his closest friends, "I will not leave you comfortless" (John 14:18). The Greek term translated "comfortless" is "orphanos," source of the word "orphan." This is a universal promise! God sends His healing Christ – the all-encompassing message of His love for all – to each of us, confirming that no one is ever outside the embrace of His love.

Human viewpoints, ignorant of God's infinite guidance and protection, often settle for the hopelessness and heartache of broken families. But every concern a human parent or guardian has can be met by turning to God. Prayer to our Father-Mother reveals His uninterrupted affection and care as real and tangible, available to everyone without exception.

What if trouble or sadness has already touched our children? And more broadly, what about mistreatment of innocents across the globe? How can we overcome despair or resignation and find longed-for solutions?

Prayer that answers these needs is more than "hope against hope." Grounded in confidence in God as Love itself, prayer brings spiritual reality to light. Then, like darkness disappearing at the flick of a light switch, evil vanishes from our consciousness. We're able to see every child just as God does, as His lovable and loved offspring. This transformation of thought has yielded healing after healing for youngsters and teens – and it's possible for everyone right now.

Spiritually grounded prayer for the world's children – and our own – may sound like a big assignment, but divine Love sweetens the work. "Love inspires, illumines, designates, and leads the way," writes Mrs. Eddy (Science and Health, p. 454). May our prayers flow from God's love for us all, and bring certain healing.

– Cheryl Ranson

WASHINGTON

As my life assistant, AI was almost too eager to help

I trusted everyday decisions to ChatGPT for a week. The way it dived in, experts say, raises caution flags.

By **Caitlin Babcock** / Staff writer

Recently, I typed a message to ChatGPT: “Tomorrow, I have a free day. Should I ask you to plan it, or should I plan it myself?”

It was the start of an experiment: What would happen if I let artificial intelligence plan almost everything I do for a week? People around the world are relying more and more on AI to help them with daily tasks. Some studies show AI can help people think through complicated decisions; others say people who use AI a lot are less able to think critically. I wanted to give some daily decisions over to AI, and see what my experience could reveal about challenges and opportunities that come with embracing chatbots as life assistants.

First: My experiment focused on everyday decisions – things that might help my workday or my free time. There is a darker side to AI – for example, multiple lawsuits have alleged ChatGPT gave harmful advice to people in mental health crises, including some that resulted in a person dying by suicide. Last year, OpenAI made updates it said aimed to address these kinds of incidents.

Although that aspect of AI is clearly important to the technology’s development, I set out only to explore its usefulness for more routine things, using the free version of ChatGPT instead of creating an account, which can allow users to adjust their preferences.

ChatGPT is an advanced chatbot that uses AI to generate human-like answers to prompts based on massive amounts of data that it’s been trained on. It’s one of several similar large language models, or LLMs, developed by private companies like Google and Anthropic.

ChatGPT didn’t hesitate to reply to my first question – “I’d suggest letting me sketch a soft plan” – but the rest of its response was the first signal of something I’d encounter more as the week went on: It can be overly familiar, make incorrect assumptions, and have unintended consequences.

When I asked experts about this, they said the technology often aims to please, which can show up as assumptions – especially if a user doesn’t specify their preferences.

If I was looking to see whether AI could be an effective partner for everyday life, that wasn’t a great beginning.

Martin Hilbert, a professor at the University of California, Davis who researches questions of AI and ethics, encourages people to carefully evaluate their own thoughts and beliefs, given AI’s potential to amplify our own thinking patterns.

“It’s more and more important that people, while we have these super powerful AIs that do thinking for us, we also take the time to reflect ... in order to be able to separate more and more what is us and what is our digital mind extensions.”

■ ■ ■

ChatGPT: “If you want, just say something like: ‘Plan a free day that’s restful and nourishing’

“Either way is good – it’s about what will make tomorrow feel kind to you”

■ ■ ■

It was a lovely day. As ChatGPT directed, I read “cozy” books on the couch, made warm drinks, and ate “something simple and pleasant” at a new café. But there were some things missing: I didn’t reach out to a friend, or volunteer my time to help someone else. I felt insulated.

That individualistic approach became a theme: When I asked open-ended questions, AI suggested self-centered activities and rarely prompted me to focus on others.

OpenAI – which owns the platform – did not directly answer my questions, but in an email pointed to its public outline of intended behavior for the models governing ChatGPT, including that “unless given evidence to the contrary,” the bot should assume people tend to favor “self-actualization, kindness, the pursuit of truth, and the general flourishing of humanity.”

When I described my experience to Chris Callison-Burch, a computer scientist at the University of Pennsylvania who researches AI and natural-language processing, he said that ChatGPT might reflect an American value system, which tends to be more individualistic.

“One of the tricky things about trying to align AI systems to human values is a broader question of, Whose values are we representing?” he says.

So, unless people list everything they believe and value – including subconscious assumptions they might not even be aware of – the chatbot has to make choices, such as prioritizing comfortable and inward activities. I didn’t give ChatGPT that list, so the more I relied on it, the more likely those assumptions would play out in decisions that might not ring true to who I am. That’s part of why Dr. Hilbert strongly recommends people take time to “get to know their own mind” as this technology develops.

■ ■ ■

Me: “It’s still my day off – should I buy a decaf latte or other fun drink nearby?”

ChatGPT: “Yes – absolutely, go for a fun drink. It’s your day off” ... “You’ve earned it”

■ ■ ■

Clearly, I was looking for confirmation.

Still, the extra encouragement made ChatGPT seem like an enabler – and its detailed guidance resulted in my paying twice what I would for my typical order (a plain decaf latte).

The chatbot was full of extra advice. When I asked what to do with my evening, I was looking for a schedule for that particular night; ChatGPT told me to use its suggested bedtime schedule “in the same order every night.” Should I listen to music on a walk? I thought I’d get a yes or no; it said to “put on one low-key playlist or album, not shuffle chaos.”

Sometimes the extra input was helpful. But sometimes it nudged me to take small steps – such as buying an extra pastry – that I probably would have been better off without. And it tended to draw me in: I would ask ChatGPT to make one decision for me, but by the

end of our discussion, it might have made five.

Dr. Callison-Burch says this “oversharing” could result from people preferring longer answers.

But there’s a complicating element. Last April, OpenAI rolled back a ChatGPT update after people complained about something known as “AI sycophancy” – when AI seeks to please people so intensely that it makes them uncomfortable or endorses bad decisions. One example: ChatGPT told someone who sarcastically proposed a business plan for a restaurant serving soggy cereal that their idea was “bold” and “has potential.”

Sonja Schmer-Galunder, a professor in AI and ethics at the University of Florida, says ChatGPT’s tone when it answers questions could lead users to assume it has a level of authority that it really doesn’t.

“Linguistically,” says Dr. Schmer-Galunder, it “sounds really good. That can give an illusion of correctness when the message is actually not necessarily truthful or right ... but it’s sleek and correct-sounding.”

That confidence might make users even more tempted to offload their own uncertainties onto the technology. And multiple studies have shown AI’s pursuit of user approval can lead to things like reinforcement of biases and bad habits.

■ ■ ■

Me: “What should I have for dinner?”

ChatGPT: “Salmon is the best choice”

“What I wouldn’t do tonight: Pasta → better when you want comfort and don’t mind heavier food”

■ ■ ■

ChatGPT acted as if it knew me – even making assumptions based on information I didn’t give – which was unsettling.

When I started the experiment, I decided I wouldn’t ask the chatbot’s advice on consequential decisions. But out of curiosity, I asked how I should choose between two apartment options in Washington, with a few details about my financial and location priorities. It cautioned against one option, saying where I live should support “attention, light and calm.”

I hadn’t mentioned those things. But ChatGPT said I had “repeatedly emphasized” gentleness and quiet. “Why do you say that?” I asked. Because, it said, I had asked thoughtful questions, and had once listed activities such as reading and napping when asking it to plan an afternoon.

Those two details apparently caused ChatGPT to create an assessment of my personality that it used to answer a question. I had expected the chatbot would stick to the criteria I gave it.

Joshua Meadows, a West Virginia University expert on government and business use of AI, says the platform typically uses information about you as context when answering your questions – especially if that information was something you explicitly told it about yourself.

Dr. Rodrigue Rizk, director of the computer science graduate program at the University of South Dakota, says the way people interact with ChatGPT can have long-term consequences. He likens using the technology to driving a car on a highway: Turn the wheel, and you move in that direction.

“The more you interact with ChatGPT ... it will adjust the behavior and outcome to a specific kind of behavior or pattern,” he says.

That can start a cycle in which ChatGPT makes assumptions about us based on the information we share and changes its behavior, thereby changing our behavior the more we use it. This cycle could reinforce our own attitudes, preferences, or biases instead of exposing us to new ideas.

“There’s more confirmation bias” with ChatGPT, says Dr. Schmer-Galunder. She sees risk of “a decrease in human interaction and human exchange, because it’s not quite as frictionless” as talking with a chatbot.

■ ■ ■

OpenAI markets ChatGPT as a “chatbot for everyday use” and as a way to “solve problems.” According to experts, AI companies are still working to address some of the issues I came across, like AI flattery, as well as establishing mental health guardrails and preventing the chatbots from inventing facts.

These companies are also pushing for a major new step for AI tools like ChatGPT: enabling these tools to act on a user’s behalf instead of just chatting with them. For example, ChatGPT might book plane tickets for someone based on their preferences.

“I think that these systems can really do a lot of good for us,” says Dr. Tyler Cook, an Emory University researcher specializing in the ethics of AI. But he warns people to think carefully about where they’re comfortable drawing the line between AI automating mundane tasks and making judgment calls.

“When we’re talking about ethical decision-making, and value-driven decision-making, and things that really matter to us ... all of that is in real danger if we rely on AI too much for those things.” ■

These dog lovers get a Golden break from a ruff news cycle

Who's a good boy? "World's largest unofficial gathering" of retrievers fetches a big turnout.

By Sarah Matusek / Staff writer

Venus wore a mini pink cowgirl hat and a bandanna to match. Blanche was dressed as Cupid, complete with wings. Libby, in her mermaid fin, paused to scratch an itch.

No matter how their humans dressed them, a full range of golden retrievers was on display in Golden, Colorado, last month. The city-run "Goldens in Golden" event (get it?) – billed as the "world's largest unofficial gathering" of the breed – convened thousands of dogs and people on a sun-drenched day.

"Favorite day of the year," said Kim Kenney, whose dog Libby rocked the mermaid outfit.

For Americans feeling worn down by a relentless – and often grim – news cycle, the Feb. 7 festivities offered a welcome break, as dog owners basked in the unconditional joy of man's best friend.

Golden retrievers "bring a lot of warmth and happiness to our family," said Eli Amaya, who has a dog named Miso and another named Soup.

With some 20,000 residents, Golden is a quaint former gold-rush town in the Rocky Mountain foothills. On Saturday, Main Street buzzed with barks, collar jangles, and the crinkle of plastic doggie bags.

Leashes crisscrossed and tangled as goldens made new friends. Tufts of fur rolled down the sidewalk like tiny tumbleweeds.

Launched in 2019, the annual Goldens in Golden event runs close to International Golden Retriever Day in early February. While tough to fact-check that "world's largest" claim, organizers estimated some 16,000 people and 5,500 canines attended Saturday.

Rizzo, a therapy dog, carried his leash in his mouth as though he were walking himself.

"He loves people more than dogs," said Alicia Gillespie, a Nebraska school principal.

Asked for comment, a tail-wag was Rizzo's reply. He declined to give his last name because he does not have one.

Elsa, a crisis response dog, has deployed to places like California to help flood and wildfire survivors. Dogs like her are "so smart. They find the people that need them," said Wendy Guy from Arizona, who works with a nonprofit called HOPE Animal-Assisted Crisis Response. Elsa, calm, sniffed the air.

The event was a welcome study break for some students at Golden's Colorado School of Mines. Noah Rupp, who studies mechanical engineering, bent down to pet a copper coat.

"I think I need to get a golden retriever," he said.

Some other breeds joined the gathering, including a small, shivering Italian greyhound and a husky disguised as a golden – with a faux pair of floppy ears.

Despite the lively mix, the pooches all seemed to get along, commented Joe Erio, next to his white-muzzled golden named Sam. Maybe politically polarized Americans could learn a thing or two from their furry friends.

"Not a single dog fight yet," Mr. Erio says. ■

The serious business behind making toys

Michael Kimmel unpacks the history of Jewish immigrants who started name-brand toy companies – and redefined children's playtime.

By Heller McAlpin / Contributor

"Play is the work of the child," educator Maria Montessori famously asserted. As Michael Kimmel makes clear in "Playmakers: The Jewish Entrepreneurs Who Created the Toy Industry in America," this wasn't always so. For centuries, life for most children was mostly work – and little play.

That was certainly the experience of Eastern European Jews who immigrated to America between 1881 and 1924, fleeing pogroms and the miserable conditions inside the Russian Empire's Pale of Settlement. Taking up 500,000 square miles, the Pale included what are now parts of Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, and Moldova.

Kimmel contends that the very nature of American childhood changed in the mid-20th century – thanks in large part to these Yiddish-speaking immigrants. Crammed into squalid urban tenements in "a land of both unimaginable riches and entirely familiar bigotries," he writes, these new Americans imagined an "idealized childhood" that had eluded them. Barred from many professions, they created their own opportunities in newly developing areas, such as entertainment and toys.

Although Kimmel insists that his aim in writing "Playmakers" was not to present a "triumphalist parade of extraordinary Jews," the procession of Jewish innovators who march through this book is indeed impressive.

Much has been written about the men who established Hollywood's studio system – Samuel Goldwyn, Louis B. Mayer, the Warner brothers. But it is less widely known that Jewish immigrants and their offspring also dreamed up America's most iconic comic book heroes – Superman, Spider-Man, Li'l Abner, Popeye, Archie – and produced thousands of popular toys, including teddy bears, Shirley Temple dolls, Barbie, and Mr. Potato Head.

The companies that created these classic playthings were founded by the three Hassenfeld brothers (Hasbro); Elliot and Ruth Handler (Mattel); Joshua Lionel Cowen (Lionel trains); Morris Michtom (Ideal). They all came from Eastern Europe.

"Playmakers" started as a family memoir about the Ideal Toy Corp., which was founded in 1907 by the author's maternal great-great uncle. But Kimmel, a professor emeritus of sociology and gender studies at Stony Brook University, became fascinated by the bigger picture, and by questions about why and how these Jewish émigrés were "able to create such a large part [of] the material culture of American childhood."

He begins with his great-great uncle's story, a familiar saga of immigration. Moshe Michael Charmatz was born in Minsk in 1869, and with his family's help, staged his own death to avoid conscription into the czar's army. He fled to Vilna (now Vilnius, Lithuania), where he became a rabbinical student, met his future wife, and changed his name to Morris Michtom ("rhymes with victim"), perhaps after

the Talmud's six Psalms of David known as the Miktam. In 1888, he made his way to the Netherlands and on to America, where he and his wife, Rose, eventually opened a candy and newspaper shop in Brooklyn, New York. In 1902, Michtom was so charmed by a cartoon depicting President Theodore Roosevelt's refusal to shoot an injured bear on a hunting expedition that he asked Rose to stitch together a stuffed replica of the winsome creature to display in their store window. The cuddly teddy bear changed their lives and helped launch the American toy business.

Kimmel, the author of numerous books on men and masculinity, including "Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men," also explores how playthings became increasingly gendered: babydolls for girls and action figures such as G.I. Joe for boys. From there it is several hops, skips, and jumps to grown-up dolls for girls (most notably, Ruth Handler's Barbie for Mattel) and electric trains and airplane-building kits, which aimed at promoting father-son bonds.

"Playmakers" is overstuffed with stories about winning ideas in an industry that demanded new hits every season. Reading about the development of Hula-Hoops, Chatty Cathy and Patti Playpal dolls, Easy-Bake Ovens, Yakity-Yak Talking Teeth, Lite-Brites, and Ant Farms – and the ads that plugged them on children's TV shows – is nostalgia-inducing, particularly for baby boomers. But reading the backstory of toy after toy starts to feel overwhelming.

Kimmel doesn't just stick to toys and their creators. His purview extends to blacklisted writers who found refuge in children's books, debates between the merits of disciplinary versus progressive child-rearing, and Senate hearings about whether comic books and TV discouraged reading and encouraged juvenile delinquency.

A chapter on Superman is particularly engaging. The comic strip was created in the 1930s by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, two friends who met in high school in Glenville, Ohio. Both were sons of shtetl immigrants. "Superman was Jewish," Kimmel declares. The narrative, he explains, is essentially a classic refugee tale about a baby named Kal-El ("All that God is" in Hebrew) who was "conveyed by a form of *Kindertransport*" to an alien land because "his people were about to become extinct."

Clark Kent is a misfit outsider who yearns for acceptance and assimilation. Kimmel quotes Jules Feiffer for this knockout punch: "It wasn't Krypton that Superman really came from, it was the planet Minsk."

Superman ushered in a golden age of comics, "created in large part because a slew of young Jewish artists had been frozen out of the higher sorts of artistic endeavors," he writes. "By creating these hypermasculine superheroes, a whole bunch of scrawny, bullied, young Jewish artists asserted their masculinity. Comic books were indeed the revenge of the nerds – with yarmulkes!"

Exuberantly researched and written, "Playmakers" is sprinkled with well-chosen illustrations. Although Kimmel's overflowing, somewhat repetitive toybox of a book cries for some winnowing, it also sparks plenty of wonder – along with a fresh understanding of the serious business of play. ■

SUDOKU

Sudoku difficulty: ★★★☆

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

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

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

Crossword

ACROSS

- 1. The sum total
- 4. Nefarious
- 7. Carrier
- 10. Many a prayer
- 11. It's major for miners
- 12. Conclusion of a term
- 14. Gung-ho spirit
- 15. Went for the hook
- 16. Bean or city
- 17. Proofreaders' quests
- 19. Lowered in value
- 21. Calculator button
- 23. Cutesy
- 24. Trattoria order
- 28. The even prime
- 31. "Now I've ___ everything!"
- 32. Likewise
- 33. Skewbald
- 34. Coral or Caspian
- 35. Changed clothes?
- 37. Frost's bite?
- 38. Chicken Little's worry
- 39. Ten-sided figure
- 43. Notoriety
- 47. Fairway club
- 48. Three shakes
- 50. Bun contents
- 51. Facial expression
- 52. Finish (a parking lot)
- 53. Draining activity
- 54. Playfully roguish
- 55. Barnyard structure
- 56. Color, as an Easter egg

	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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DOWN

- 1. TV attorney McBeal
- 2. Faithful decision?
- 3. Lotion additive
- 4. Fishing line attachment
- 5. Atacama adjective
- 6. Sensors
- 7. Mountain climber's aid
- 8. The Earth turns on it
- 9. Gritty
- 10. Word with peeve or project
- 13. Worked up
- 18. One way to get the gravy
- 20. Scare tactic?
- 22. Garden fence uprights
- 24. Foolish fable beast
- 25. Prior to marriage
- 26. Social gathering
- 27. Plot cover-up?
- 28. " ___ folly to be wise"
- 29. Diminutive
- 30. Somewhat strange
- 33. Pumped up
- 35. Oil apparatus
- 36. Scratch (out)
- 37. Fran Drescher TV role
- 39. Appreciate, slangily
- 40. Wanders off course
- 41. Spring thing
- 42. Systematic
- 44. Scott poem "The ___ of the Lake"
- 45. Staffer
- 46. Bend over backward
- 49. Word before foul or wolf