

The New York Times

“All the News That’s Fit to Print”

THE WEATHER
Today, clouds, some sun, not as cold, high 40. **Tonight**, cloudy, snow, slow travel, low 28. **Tomorrow**, snow early, cloudy, brisk, cold, slow travel, high 31. Weather map, Page B10.

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Prices in Canada may be higher \$4.00



LAETTIA VANCON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A blackout in Chernihiv, Ukraine, last week. Ukrainians must deal with regular power cuts as Russian forces attack the electrical grid.

For Ukrainians, U.S. Talks Are Just Background Din to Blackouts

By KIM BARKER

KYIV, Ukraine — Every morning, Anna Kuzmishcheva checks online for what has become the most important information in Ukraine related to the war.

She is not looking for developments in peace talks. Instead, she monitors the government’s daily update on how many hours of electricity she will have that day — sometimes six, sometimes nine

— and when she will have them.

For Ms. Kuzmishcheva and other Ukrainians, the latest diplomatic bustle orchestrated by the United States is just noise, a dance performed by the country’s leaders in the hope that the Trump administration will not entirely abandon Ukraine.

Many Ukrainians say they believe the United States has sided with Russia and is rushing to check another peacemaking box

Weary, and Counting Hours of Electricity

at any cost to Ukraine. Whatever concessions their country might make, Ukrainians say, Russia has no interest in a deal anyway.

Pushed again onto the American diplomatic merry-go-round, Ukrainians are focused less on the

number of points in a peace plan and more on how to live through regularly scheduled blackouts as Russian forces bombard the electrical system.

“I barely believe anything will come from these negotiations,” said Ms. Kuzmishcheva, 38, who works in the pharmaceutical industry and lives near Kyiv, the capital. “This has happened so many times — nothing ever

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Seized Tanker Was a Lifeline Of Oil to Cuba

In Exchange, Maduro Got Security Boost

This article is by Anatoly Kurmanov, Nicholas Nehamas and Farnaz Fassihi.

The oil tanker seized by the United States off the coast of Venezuela this week was part of the Venezuelan government’s effort to support Cuba, according to documents and people inside the Venezuelan oil industry.

The tanker, which is called Skipper, left Venezuela on Dec. 4, carrying nearly two million barrels of the country’s heavy crude, according to internal data from Venezuela’s state oil company, known as PDVSA. The ship’s scheduled destination was listed as the Cuban port of Matanzas, the data shows.

Two days after its departure, Skipper offloaded a small fraction of its oil, an estimated 50,000 barrels, to another ship, called Neptune 6, which then headed north toward Cuba, according to the shipping data firm Kpler. After the transfer, Skipper headed east, toward Asia, with the vast majority of its oil on board, according to a U.S. official briefed on the matter.

President Nicolás Maduro of Venezuela and his predecessor, Hugo Chávez, have for decades sent oil to Cuba at highly subsidized prices, providing a crucial resource at low cost to the impoverished island.

In return, the Cuban government over the years has sent tens of thousands of medics, sports instructors and, increasingly, security professionals on assignments to Venezuela. That exchange has assumed special importance as Mr. Maduro has leaned on Cuban bodyguards and counterintelligence officers to protect himself against the U.S. military buildup in the Caribbean.

In recent years, however, only a fraction of Venezuelan oil set aside for Cuba has actually reached the island, according to PDVSA documents and tanker tracking data.

Most of the oil allocated for Cuba has instead been resold to China, with the money providing badly needed hard currency for the Cuban government, according to multiple people close to the Venezuelan government.

Some of that money is believed to have been used by Cuban officials to purchase basic goods, though the opacity of the country’s economy makes it difficult to estimate where that money ends up, or how it is spent.

On Friday, Cuban officials condemned the American seizure of the tanker, calling it in a statement an “act of piracy and maritime terrorism” that has a “negative effect on Cuba” and its people.

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JOHNSON FLAILING AS HIS OWN PARTY UNDERMINES HIM

RANK AND FILE RESTIVE

Republicans Deploy Rare Tool to Circumvent Speaker on Votes

By MICHAEL GOLD

WASHINGTON — In the House of Representatives, the speaker controls everything, from office space to what legislation can get a vote on the House floor. But lately, time and again, Speaker Mike Johnson appears to have lost his grip.

It happened on Thursday, when Mr. Johnson was forced to stand by, powerless to stop a group of breakaway Republicans from teaming up with Democrats to pass what amounted to a rebuke of President Trump, delivered by a legislative body run by his own party.

In a 231-to-195 vote, the House approved a bill by Representative Jared Golden of Maine, a conservative Democrat, that would overturn a Trump executive order that stripped union protections from scores of federal workers.

The measure faces long odds in the Senate. But its success in the House was the latest indication that Mr. Johnson’s hold on his razor-thin majority has become increasingly slippery, as rank-and-file Republicans flout his wishes.

They are doing so not just by refusing to vote for the party position on important bills, but also, increasingly, by using a once-rare parliamentary maneuver to steer around the speaker and commander the House floor to bring up legislation that he does not want considered at all. The tactic has undercut Mr. Johnson’s leadership and diminished his power over the chamber’s agenda at a time when some rank-and-file Republicans are questioning his approach and complaining that he is disregarding the will of his members.

That has led more and more Republicans to resort to what is

Continued on Page A14



ERIC LEE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Mike Johnson said he is “not a fan” of a tactic his peers use.

CANNABIS AS AID FACING SCRUTINY

Researchers Find Little Evidence of Benefit

By JAN HOFFMAN

To treat their pain, anxiety and sleep problems, millions of Americans turn to cannabis, which is now legal in 40 states for medical use. But a new review of 15 years of research concludes that the evidence of its benefits is often weak or inconclusive, and that nearly 30 percent of medical cannabis patients meet criteria for cannabis use disorder.

“The evidence does not support the use of cannabis or cannabinoids at this point for most of the indications that folks are using it for,” said Dr. Michael Hsu, an addiction psychiatrist and clinical instructor at the University of California, Los Angeles, and the lead author of the review, which was published last month in the medical journal JAMA. (Cannabis refers to the entire plant; cannabinoids are its many compounds.)

The analysis arrives amid a surging acceptance and normalization of cannabis products, a \$32 billion industry. For the review, addiction experts at academic medical centers across the country studied more than 2,500 clinical trials, guidelines and surveys conducted mostly in the United States and Canada. They found a wide gulf between the health purposes for which the public seeks out cannabis and what gold-standard science shows about its effectiveness.

The researchers distinguished between medical cannabis, sold at dispensaries, and pharmaceutical-grade cannabinoids — the

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A flourishing industry of illicit gambling has set its sights on younger recruits . . .



. . . using social media influencers and celebrities like Drake to lure teenagers . . .

. . . leaving a population most vulnerable to addiction in substantial debt.

How Crypto Casinos Hook Next Generation

This article is by Neil Bedi, Aric Toler and Jenny Vrentas.

David was 14 when he placed his first bet with a crypto casino, a website where people use cryptocurrencies to gamble on online games.

Stuck at home during the pandemic, he started spending more time on the sites. He watched as celebrities, like Drake and the live-streamer Adin Ross, played on the casinos, too.

Social media personalities collected huge paydays for streaming more and more videos hyping the sites. David, meanwhile, developed a gambling addiction before he turned 18 and lost thousands of dollars.

David and many people like him — young and chronically online — have been enticed by crypto casinos, an expanding realm of online gambling where longstanding guardrails are often ignored.

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University of Texas Is Brought To Heel by Conservative Critics

By VIMAL PATEL

AUSTIN — In a state dominated by conservatives, the University of Texas at Austin stood out.

Its leadership had often been a thorn in the side of the state’s politicians, resisting efforts to erode faculty power and championing diversity efforts. The university successfully defended its race-conscious admissions policy all the way to the Supreme Court in 2016. It has long been a magnet for liberal students and student activism.

Today, the conservatives are winning. State Republicans have passed laws to curtail what is taught in college classrooms and installed new university administrators with partisan affiliations,

State Laws Changing What Is Taught

among a host of new strategies to remake a public higher education system that they argue has been held hostage to left-leaning ideas and become hostile to conservative ones.

The University of Texas is one of their main targets.

The campus is no longer led by an academic, but a Republican lawyer who worked for the state’s attorney general, Ken Paxton. The president has promised curricular changes, and the system is now conducting an audit of all gender studies courses, after a State

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INTERNATIONAL A4-12

A Series of Wins for China

President Trump’s moves to loosen chip controls, soften U.S. language and stay silent on tensions with Japan have been strategic gains for Beijing. PAGE A11

Bulgaria’s Gen Z-Led Upheaval

Young people brought about a prime minister’s resignation. Will they stay engaged in new elections? PAGE A10

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The End of an Era at Yaddo

After 25 years at the artist retreat in upstate New York, its president, Elaina Richardson, is stepping down. PAGE C1

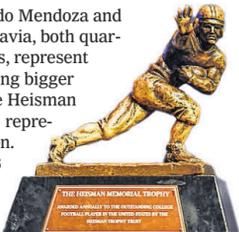
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A Shock to the Mets’ Core

Losing the franchise stalwarts Edwin Díaz and Pete Alonso puts pressure on the front office to deliver. PAGE B7

Latino and Hispanic Candidates

Fernando Mendoza and Diego Pavia, both quarterbacks, represent something bigger than the Heisman Trophy: representation. PAGE B6



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Trouble at Surrogacy Firm

An Oregon agency abruptly closed, and clients have lost thousands of dollars meant to compensate women carrying their pregnancies. PAGE A13

Quandary for Alaskan Village

After a devastating storm, the people who fled a remote coastal outpost face a major question: Should they rebuild or should they relocate? PAGE A18

Escaping Rising Waters

In Washington State, officials warned that levees and dams would be at risk for days, and people should be wary even as the waters recede. PAGE A17

BUSINESS B1-5

An \$85,000 Scam, No Refund

A retired lawyer lost the money in a tech support scam, an online fraud that is surging. Citibank said it couldn’t recover the funds, which criminals wired from inside his account. PAGE B1

Inside India’s Airline Meltdown

A tangle of problems at IndiGo, the country’s dominant carrier, resulted in gridlocked airports across the nation. Worse, it was the symptom of an even bigger problem. PAGE B1

OPINION A22-23

Thomas L. Friedman PAGE A23

BOOK REVIEW



THIS WEEKEND



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