

The New York Times

"All the News That's Fit to Print"

THE WEATHER

Today, hot, humid, sunny, breezy, high 95. Tonight, warm, humid, mainly clear, low 76. Tomorrow, humid, early sun, afternoon storms, high 93. Weather map, Page B10.

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TUESDAY, MAY 19, 2026

Prices in Canada may be higher \$4.00



Iraqi tanker trucks last month near Baniyas, a Syrian port on the Mediterranean. Damascus is hungry for investment so it can rebuild.

After Trump Drops Suit, U.S. Allots \$1.8 Billion As 'Redress' to His Allies

Critics Call Deal a Political Slush Fund

This article is by Glenn Thrush, Andrew Duehren and Alan Feuer.

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration on Monday announced the creation of a \$1.8 billion fund to compensate those who claim they were targeted by the Biden Justice Department and Democrats, forging a pipeline to funnel taxpayer money to President Trump's allies.

The highly unusual "anti-weaponization" fund — denounced by critics as a political slush fund — was unveiled just after Mr. Trump withdrew his lawsuit against the Internal Revenue Service demanding at least \$10 billion. It was apparently an effort to skirt oversight by the judge in the case, who had expressed concern that the suit represented self-dealing between the president and a department run by his former defense lawyer, Todd Blanche, now the acting attorney general.

The tandem moves amounted to an end-run that appeared to strip Judge Kathleen M. Williams, who had been overseeing the I.R.S. case in the Southern District of Florida, of her appointed role in approving a formal settlement agreement. By dismissing the case in its entirety, Mr. Trump was able to reach an agreement with his own appointees without risking the rebuke of an impartial and

independent arbiter.

The cash value of the fund was set at \$1.776 billion, a nod to the nation's founding. The Justice Department added in its announcement that its creation was intended "to provide a systematic process to hear and redress claims of others who suffered weaponization and lawfare," though it offered few other details, including who might qualify.

The announcement invited immediate pushback and raised the possibility of legal challenges outside Mr. Trump's original lawsuit, though it remained unclear who would be able to show that they had been harmed by the creation of the fund and therefore had a right to sue. Still, Judge Williams, tacitly acknowledging her hands were tied, accepted the president's dismissal of the suit and formally closed the case by the end of the day.

"This is one of the single most corrupt acts in American history," said Donald K. Sherman, president of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, a nonprofit legal watchdog group that has been critical of the administration.

In addition to withdrawing his suit against the I.R.S., Mr. Trump will also drop separate administrative claims. Those include his

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L.I.R.R. Strike Causes a Rush Hour by Hour

By STEFANOS CHEN

A strike that shut down the Long Island Rail Road, America's busiest passenger rail service, upended the routines of a quarter-million weekday riders on Monday, with little hope of a quick resolution in sight.

Many commuters who rely on the railroad, which carries about 270,000 people a day between New York City and its eastern suburbs, got their first taste of what a protracted labor dispute could look like as they took a patchwork of buses, car pools and subway trains to clock in on time. Or not.

"Three hours going to work is just not worth it — my job doesn't pay that much," Vanessa Zhang, 38, said in an interview Monday morning at the Hicksville station on Long Island, where transit officials were providing a limited number of shuttle buses to Queens.

She had missed the last bus to get to her retail sales job in Midtown Manhattan by a hair. Her only other options were to take her chances on a different, unfamiliar bus network, or order a pricey Uber.

"I'll take a sick day," she said, before heading home.

Members of five unions that represent about half of the work force on the Long Island Rail Road — more than 3,500 employees, including engineers, signal workers and others who are vital to train operation — walked off the job early Saturday morning, after three years of failed efforts to secure higher wages. They have not received a raise since 2022.

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Syria Offers a Strait-Skipping Overland Outlet

By RAJA ABDULRAHIM

DAMASCUS, Syria — When the war that engulfed the Middle East in recent months cut off access to one of the world's most important shipping routes, Syria saw an opportunity.

With multiple Mediterranean ports and borders with Turkey, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon, the country offers a desperately needed alternative to the blocked Strait of Hormuz, a strategic waterway that, before the war, was used to transport a hefty share of the global oil supply.

Iraq and Gulf states including the United Arab Emirates have al-

Seizing Its Opportunity as Plan B for Moving Oil and Goods

ready begun to transport oil and other goods overland to ship from Syria.

"After the closure of the Hormuz Strait, pretty much all the neighboring countries in the region knocked on our door to get access to our Syrian ports," said Mazen Alloush, the director of local and international relations for Syria's borders and customs au-

thority. "They are making Plan B's in case the crisis goes on longer."

To take advantage of these new opportunities, however, Syria must overcome many obstacles, including widespread power and water shortages. Syrian infrastructure was devastated in a nearly 14-year civil war that ended in 2024, when rebels ousted the longtime dictator Bashar al-Assad.

Syria has a long history as a link in global trade.

"Syria was the old Silk Road. It was an important trade route," said Hazem Alsabeeh, the public relations director of Syria's General Authority for Free Zones.

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A Texas City Is Running Out of Water

Corpus Christi's water emergency serves as a cautionary tale for the rest of the country. Page A11.

When a Reputation Management Firm Took On the Epstein Files

By ROBERT DRAPER

WASHINGTON — Senior members of Terakeet, a reputation management firm, huddled in April 2024 to discuss what they could do for their new and potentially biggest client, Goldman Sachs, and its general counsel. She was suddenly the subject of unwanted publicity for her association with the sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein.

Terakeet's chief executive and co-founder, Mac Cummings, de-

scribed the counsel, Kathryn Ruemmler, to the others at the meeting as a "friend of mine" and the "executive sponsor" of the Goldman Sachs account, according to an audio recording of the meeting obtained by The New York Times.

Mr. Cummings added with some hyperbole that Ms. Ruemmler, a former White House counsel in the Obama administration, was "the most accomplished, brilliant lawyer in the United States, possibly the world," and that she "prob-

Lawyer's Closeness Was Too Much to Spin

ably will be at some point a Supreme Court justice of the United States — she is cool, she is fun, she's interesting."

There was just one problem, Mr. Cummings said. After leaving the White House, Ms. Ruemmler had entered private practice and met with Mr. Epstein.

"She's done nothing wrong," Mr. Cummings told his subordinates. "But like the other thousands of people that met him over the course of the last 20 years, her name is on something, her name is in a news article, which isn't really helpful when you're trying to be in the C-suite of Goldman Sachs. So that's probably an area that we're going to zone in on."

Zone in on Ms. Ruemmler's troubles they did. Over the next 20 months, according to internal doc-

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Loss for Musk In His Lawsuit Over OpenAI

By CADE METZ and MIKE ISAAC

OAKLAND, Calif. — Elon Musk's \$150 billion lawsuit against OpenAI and Sam Altman was quickly rejected by a federal jury on Monday, in a major blow to Mr. Musk's credibility and his effort to become a serious competitor in the artificial intelligence race.

The nine-member jury, deliberating for less than two hours in U.S. District Court in Oakland, Calif., found that Mr. Musk had failed to file his lawsuit within a time frame required by law. The presiding judge, Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers, dismissed Mr. Musk's claims after the jury's decision.

Mr. Musk's lead lawyer immediately said the tech mogul would appeal the decision, while OpenAI's lawyers celebrated with back slaps in the hallway outside the courtroom. Neither Mr. Musk nor Mr. Altman was in the courtroom when the verdict was read.

In a social media post a few hours later, Mr. Musk attacked Judge Gonzalez Rogers, calling her an "activist Oakland judge, who simply used the jury as a fig leaf" for a decision that "creates such a terrible precedent."

The outcome preserves the status quo in Silicon Valley's race to build artificial intelligence, with OpenAI maintaining its role as one of the tech industry's most essential companies. And it thwarted Mr. Musk's efforts to im-

plode an organization he helped to create in 2015. Mr. Musk had accused OpenAI; its chief executive, Mr. Altman; and its president, Greg Brockman, of "stealing a charity" by attaching a commercial company to OpenAI, which was founded as a nonprofit, and taking billions of dollars in investments from Microsoft. He also accused them of unjustly enriching themselves

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Trump's Rating Slumps to 37%, New Poll Shows

This article is by Lisa Lerer, Ruth Igielnik and Camille Baker.

Most voters think President Trump made the wrong decision to go to war with Iran, a New York Times/Siena poll found, leaving the Republican Party on rocky political footing heading into the midterm elections as his approval ratings sink and economic concerns rise.

Majorities of voters said that the war was not worth the costs

THE NEW YORK TIMES/SIENA POLL
May 11-15

Do you think Donald Trump's decision to go to war with Iran was the ...



All respondents



Based on a New York Times/Siena poll of 1,507 registered voters nationwide conducted May 11 to 15. The gray segment is for voters who did not respond or said they didn't know.

ASHLEY CALAND CHRISTINE ZHANG, THE NEW YORK TIMES

and held deeply pessimistic views about the economy.

Mr. Trump's approval rating — a key historical predictor of how a president's party will fare in an election — has sunk to a second-low in Times/Siena polls of 37 percent amid the deeply unpopular Middle East conflict.

Nearly two-thirds of voters said that going to war had been the wrong decision, including almost three-quarters of politically cru-

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NATIONAL A11-20

Fidelity to Trump on Ballot

Representative Thomas Massie, above, an irritant to the president, is facing a tough primary in Kentucky. PAGE A14

Deadly Shooting at Mosque

Three men were killed outside a San Diego mosque, and two suspects were found dead, the police said. PAGE A17

INTERNATIONAL A4-10

U.S. Demands Greenland Role

The island's officials are worried as the Trump administration keeps pressing for more influence over its resources and business deals. PAGE A8

Bargaining Chip or Gift to Xi?

President Trump's open willingness to hold up a \$14 billion Taiwan arms package is already a win for Beijing. PAGE A10

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A.I. and Humans Battle It Out

The bots managed to hold their own when college students tested cybersecurity in a national contest. PAGE B1



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Drilling for Climate Clues

A mission to pierce a fast-melting Antarctic glacier faced a rigid deadline under very difficult conditions. PAGE D1

Tough Road to Motherhood

Pregnancy with lupus is still risky despite advances in treatment. We followed one woman's journey. PAGE D1

SPORTS B6-9

Wearing Rivalry on His Skin

Miles McBride of the Knicks got a tattoo on his leg as a poke at his older brother. It now reflects his newfound confidence going into the Eastern Conference finals. PAGE B6

Scandal as World Cup Looms

The head of South American soccer is facing an ethics complaint that he received payments recovered from a 2015 investigation of FIFA that shook the sport globally. PAGE B7

OPINION A22-23

David French

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Looking for the Owners

A new room in a French museum's permanent display includes 13 pieces that were recovered from the Nazis and whose provenance is unknown. PAGE C5



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